

The North Sea Regional Advisory Council



Executive Committee (ExCom) Record of Meeting October 15-16th 2007, Aalborg, Denmark

Rapporteur: A D Hawkins

Final Record

1. Apologies & Welcome

- 1.1 The Chair of the ExCom, Hugo Andersson, welcomed participants to the meeting and thanked Danish colleagues for their assistance in arranging it in Aalborg. Apologies were offered by Erling Skåtøy, Marika Nilsson, Jenny Hatchard, Emiel Brouckaert, Giles Bartlett, Jarek Zielinsky, Javier Garat, Pierre George Dachicourt, Euan Dunn and Nicki Holmyard. The report of the Vienna ExCom was adopted. The agenda for the meeting was agreed.

2. Election of Chair and Vice-Chairs

- 2.1 Hugo Andersson was unanimously elected as Chair of the Executive Committee. Michael Park and Christien Absil were elected unanimously as the two Vice-Chairs.

3. Update from the Commission

- 3.1 Emmanouil Papaioannou from the Commission gave an overview of current issues and priorities. A new funding arrangement for the RACs is in place as of June 2007. We are now in the phasing-in period. A transitional financial arrangement had been provided for the NSRAC and the BSRAC. A new desk officer had been appointed and will join DG-Fisheries on 1.11.2007. The process has been launched to recruit a new financial officer for the RACs. The task of reviewing the RACs was under way. . One of the consequences of the funding change was that auditors would show an interest in the new financial regime. A major difference was that there would no longer be a separate contract for interpretation and translation. An allocation for this would be included in the operational grant to the RAC which would have to ensure that sufficient resources were set aside for interpretation and translation.

- 3.2 A joint consultation meeting with ACFA and the RACs would take place on 13th November on TACs and quotas. A consultation meeting with the RACs would take place on the 11th December.
- 3.3 Last week, the Commission had adopted its Maritime Policy package together with a detailed action plan. A Ministerial Conference would take place later this month (22 October) and the European Council would respond on the package in December. A proposal for tackling illegal, unregulated and unreported fisheries, and a second one regarding destructive fishing practices, were due for adoption by the Commission on 17.10.2007 and would lead to the adoption of two Regulations in due course. These proposals are accompanied by impact assessments.
- 3.4 In October the TACs and quotas for the Baltic would be discussed. In November TACs and quotas for the Black Sea would be considered. For the North Sea, the ACFM advice would be provided tomorrow. During the remainder of 2007 the Commission would, *inter alia*, be trying to resolve issues over an effort management scheme for the Kattegat on the basis of available input from the NSRAC, and would be working towards the adoption of Council conclusions on Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) following the Communication on this topic.
- 3.5 Next year – 2008 – the policy priorities would include core business, like TACs and quotas and cod recovery, with new emphasis on aquaculture, and on control and enforcement. The Commission was recasting the current legal framework and would be aiming to simplify existing rules. It also wished to take forward proposals on Illegal, unregulated and unreported fisheries. The Court of Auditors is expected to issue a special report on control and enforcement of the CFP before the end of the year. Following discussions on simplification and improvements to the regulations a new proposal for technical measures in the North Atlantic would come forward. All major legislative proposals would in future be subject to impact assessment for environmental, social and economic effects. This would be a new process requiring external experts.
- 3.6 ExCom members were concerned that progress by the RAC in developing long term management plans would require time and money. In particular, resources would be required for the Development Groups to pursue their work. There was a wish to discuss this issue with the Commission. In the case of plaice, the next phase of the management plan required impact assessment work to be done by STECF. The NSRAC had written to the Commission asking when the necessary work would be done, but the Commission had not yet answered.
- 3.7 In terms of obtaining funding from the Commission, the reality was that contracts could not be signed by the Commission without a call for tenders, where the RACs would have to compete for funding with other bidders. EFF funding might be a possibility but most member states had already identified their funding priorities. With respect to impact assessment of the plan for plaice, the Commission was aware of the request and would be responding. Discussion was concluded with the Chair pointing out that the Development Groups were important to the Commission, as they would be the main source of advice on long term management plans. Additional funding would be required for the

Development Groups if they were to be successful. This issue of funding needed to be discussed and resolved with the Commission.

4. The Community Fisheries Control Agency

- 4.1 The agency is a newly established body which aims to bring about cooperation on control and enforcement between member states. The Advisory Board, on which the RACs are represented, and which conveys the views of stakeholders, had met last week to discuss the programme for 2008. The Administrative Board would meet on Wednesday to take the work programme forward. The current priorities are essentially the same as for 2007, with cod and illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing being given high priority. Joint activities had already taken place and had resulted in the detection of infringements. More details will be given later in the year.
- 4.2 A workshop on control is planned for early next year (January 24-25th, Scotland), involving the RACs and CFCA. The Baltic RAC had previously met with the CFCA and this event had been accompanied by a Ministerial Declaration on unreported fishing in the Baltic.
- 4.3 Hugo Andersson, the Chair of the NSRAC ExCom had been elected by the Advisory Board to represent it on the Administrative Board of the CFCA.

5. Report of the Dublin Workshop on Technical Conservation Measures

- 5.1 Killybegs Fishermen's Organisation had hosted a major international workshop in Dublin on September 13th and 14th 2007 which was addressed by senior representatives of the European Commission, several of the acknowledged leaders in the field of fishery science, gear technologists, fishery managers and active fishermen drawn from the North Eastern Atlantic and North Sea fishing industry. The workshop had highlighted the importance of involving the fishing industry in the critical subject of technical conservation measures especially in relation to the new Technical Conservation Measures Regulation.
- 5.2 Michel Goujon briefly summarised the outcomes of the workshop. It had underlined the importance of simplifying minimum landing sizes; drawn attention to the need to move towards regional solutions; and had stressed the value of regular evaluation and assessment of the efficacy of the regulations. The main issue was how to apply measures without undue concentration upon each individual species. Regulations should be set up as a general framework, but with an annex for each RAC. Technical provisions could be very complex. Many attempts had been made to improve gear selectivity, but such measures required continuing dialogue between fishers and scientists. They also required incentives for their adoption. There had been a consensus that the regulations really did need to be changed. Feedback from fishermen was very important and should be fully utilized.

- 5.3 A regional approach was especially important. There needed to be local incentives to achieve selectivity and to reduce damage to the environment and ecosystems
- 5.4 The general conclusion had been that the workshop had been very successful. The Commission, scientists and fishers had found they were speaking in similar terms. The existing arrangements were too top-down, too prescriptive and often incomprehensible to those who had to conform to them. The Commission was open to new approaches, tailored to regional problems. It must realize, however, that catch composition rules had been too strongly promoted in the past, and that there were immense practical problems in applying that approach. A particular problem was that although the Commission had said it had bought into a bottom-up process it was still coming up with proposals which were top-down. There was concern that the Commission was unwilling to fully engage in listening to what fishers had to say. On the other hand, if fishers did not come forward with ideas of their own then the Commission would have no alternative but to come forward with its own ideas. There was a heavy responsibility upon all parties to reach agreement.
- 5.5 Unfortunately the full report on the workshop had not yet been received, delaying the NSRAC Demersal Working Group in its task of preparing a full response on the new technical measures regulation.

6. The Fishery Approach

- 6.1 Michel Goujon outlined a new approach to managing fisheries which was being developed within the CNPMM. The approach aimed at the improvement of fisheries management and the further development of fishery science. It was also concerned with a move towards conveying access rights to resources.
- 6.2 An essential feature of the approach was that it was centred upon the individual fisheries and based on the elaboration of regulations for each fishery or management unit. Those regulations would be based on proposals from local stakeholders rather than the application of a universal regulation applying to all and hampered by many annexes and derogations. Essentially, management would be through a framework regulation, which defined the management objectives, authorised particular practices, and set out general rules. However, detailed management measures would apply only in each fishery or management unit. By this means the process of management would be simplified, and individual fishers would only need to be familiar with the measures applying to their particular fishery, gathered together in a single, short document.
- 6.3 The 'fishery approach' would essentially be aiming at promoting the greater involvement of fishers in management of their fisheries, and would take forward the initiatives which had begun with the setting-up of the RACs. The RACs would take responsibility at the regional seas or ecosystem level, with a lower layer of management bodies taking responsibility for the individual fisheries. The attachment of fishers to their fishery would provide greater coherence and responsibility and would promote a sense of co-ownership. The stable regime now offered through the RACs had provided room for new ideas to develop. We

should be aiming to develop those ideas for the further reform of the CFP due to take place in 2012.

- 6.4 It was commented that this was a very strong proposition coming from part of the industry itself. It might not get the support of everyone but it was an interesting approach that required further discussion and refinement. Recreational anglers commented that they had not been included in this proposal for a more holistic scheme of management, but they should be part of it, as there were many good examples of cooperation between recreational and commercial fishers.
- 6.5 The proposal was supported as a good starting point – many members wished to take an approach based on the fisheries themselves - but there remained many questions. The RAC Development Groups, preparing long term management plans for the fisheries, were a good way forward. We should see how these progressed. There was much to be said for having regulations which applied to a particular vessel in a particular area. There were concerns, however, over the definition of the fisheries. Conditions changes and individuals might wish to switch from one fishery to another. Does this proposal mean more rigid segmentation, or would it include scope for change to take place? There were also problems over how conflict between fishers would be resolved.
- 6.6 Michel Goujon replied that the Commission would remain in charge under these proposals. The RACs might need to be redefined to ensure they corresponded to particular ecosystems. They would have an advisory role as at present. The new system would not be incompatible with an ITQ system. It would allow ITQs to operate in some circumstances - but not everywhere. Conflict would always take place in fisheries but would be less with more sustainable fisheries. Inevitably there would be problems with new fishers wishing to enter fisheries which were managed well.
- 6.7 Others were concerned that this proposal was going too far. We certainly did not have the management system we required and we did need to move towards something better, but we did not want a complete change in the structure. Too much money had already been invested and was at stake.
- 6.8 The Chair concluded that we did need some discussion of systems which worked better than the current one. This presentation had been a contribution to that debate, and he thanked Michel for opening up an important subject

7 Discards

- 7.1 Barrie Deas reported briefly on the Study Tour of Iceland and Norway organized by the Commission and attended by himself and Nigel Proctor from the NSRAC. The NSRAC Position Paper on discards advocated a fishery by fishery approach. It resisted a ban on discards as too simplistic. In Iceland, a very flexible system of fisheries management is built around ITQs. There is a discard ban on 20 species. The ban is regarded as successful, but is easy to apply because few of the fisheries are mixed. The economic measures through ITQs are also regarded as successful, and are supplemented by the application of closed areas.

- 7.2 Norway is also proud of its approach which is designed to reduce catches of juvenile fish. It includes a system of Real Time Area Closures (RTCs), with special rules for certain fisheries. The discard ban and the RTCs provide incentives to adopt selective fishing gears which reduce the capture of young fish. The Norwegian system has evolved over several years and Norwegians recognize that discarding cannot be eliminated overnight. The measures are also tailored to the characteristics of the different fleets and have been refined and adapted with time. The Commission needs to recognize that the reduction in discards is an evolutionary process.
- 7.3 The overall lesson from the Study Tour was that although there is much to be learned from Iceland and Norway we could not copy them slavishly. Many of our fisheries are mixed and pose exceptionally difficult management problems.
- 7.4 In response to a question on the lessons learned by the Commission from the Study Tour the ExCom was informed that there would be a detailed report from the Commission presented to ACFA WG1. The Commission was now working on more specific proposals.
- 7.5 It was agreed that one of the problems for the NSRAC was how to provide fishers with incentives to reduce discarding. The initiatives outlined in the draft position paper on cod recovery, including RTCs, additional days-at-sea for vessels showing reductions in discards recorded by observers and for individual vessel avoidance plans would take us in the right direction. However, with cod it was not just a matter of reducing the discarding of juvenile fish. With the improved survival of cod in the North Sea and Skagerrak vessels were now catching a range of sizes of cod, many of them above minimum landing size, but did not have sufficient quota to land them. This was an exceptionally difficult problem to resolve. A regime change was needed to deal with the landing of out of quota fish. The NSRAC would have to deal with this and should be heavily involved in seeking a sensible solution.
- 7.6 A Norwegian speaker drew attention to differences between the experience with RTCs in the Barents Sea and in the North Sea. The North Sea was much more complicated because of the mix of species. RTCs should be part of an integrated package of measures. However, he had been very encouraged by the Danish and Scottish initiatives, and welcomed the change in attitude of the Commission towards such measures. A spokesman for the Commission remarked that the emphasis would now be on regional measures, not a horizontal approach

8. Feedback from the Development Groups

- 8.1 The NSRAC had established 5 Development Groups to take forward the development of long term management plans. Restricted funding had meant that these groups had not met as often as had originally been planned.
- 8.2 The *Nephrops* Development Group, reported on by Michael Park, had had one meeting and was now awaiting a report from Fisheries Research Services

(Scotland) on the state of *Nephrops* stocks before formulating a long term approach.

- 8.3 The Cod/Haddock/Whiting Development Group, chaired by Barrie Deas, had been seeking a clearer definition of the extent of the fishery. An analysis by CEFAS (England) had now been completed and a date was being set for a meeting involving all the stakeholders.
- 8.4 The Flatfish Development Group chaired by Nathalie Steins was in a rather more advanced position as a management plan for plaice and sole had already been agreed. The group was now seeking a socio-economic evaluation of the impact of the plan to be delivered by STECF. The NSRAC had written to the Commission following the Dublin meeting of the Demersal WG seeking information on progress with the assessment. No reply had yet been received.
- 8.5 The Monkfish Development Group, chaired by Jacques Pichon, had met in Paris, and had conducted a preliminary analysis of the fishery. There was a lack of data on monkfish but some of those gaps were now being filled. There was a question over the cod by-catch in the fishery. A lack of funding had prevented further meetings being held.
- 8.6 The Saithe Development Group, chaired by Patrice Leduc would hold another meeting soon; once the ICES advice for saithe had been updated.

9. ICES Advice for 2008

- 9.1 Dr Martin Pastoors, chair of ACFM presented the latest advice on the main North Sea stocks. The October assessment is essentially an update of that carried out in May, informed by Autumn surveys, including the International Bottom Trawl Survey in the 3rd quarter (IBTS) (cod, haddock, whiting), the Scottish Ground Fish Survey (SGFS), the English Ground Fish Survey (EGFS), and the Beam Trawl Survey (BTS) (plaice, sole). Fishery information was also available for the first half of 2007 for sandeel and Norway pout. New assessments and forecasts were available for:

- North Sea cod
- North Sea sandeel
- Norway pout

New recruitment estimates and new forecasts were available for:

- North Sea plaice
- North Sea sole

New recruitment estimates – with no changes to the forecasts – were available for:

- North Sea haddock
- North Sea whiting

The results of the Fishers' Survey, carried out for the NSRAC, had been considered in the relevant stock sections.

- 9.2 For cod in the North Sea, eastern Channel and Skagerrak, the new perception was that the 2005 year class was stronger than previous assessments (~50% of the average). There had been higher survival of recent year classes (lower mortality) and therefore a changed outlook. The level of unaccounted removals had diminished (the source of unaccounted removals was not specified). Spawning stock biomass (SSB) was rising and fishing mortality was falling. The outlook was for SSB to continue to rise. Thus, despite the low stock size and recent poor recruitment, it was estimated that the cod stock could be rebuilt to the precautionary level of SSB (B_{pa}) (with a 50% probability) at the start of 2009 with a fishing mortality of less than 0.13. This corresponded to total removals (landings, discards, and unaccounted removals) of 22 000 t. It was not possible to translate removals into a TAC.
- 9.3 The conclusion for cod was that a stronger year class had entered the stock, increasing the available fishable biomass. Currently, if fisheries continued in the same way and landings were restricted, this could result in increases in discards and unaccounted removals. Managers must therefore consider options for better control of the fishery, and especially better enforcement. Incentives were required to reduce the catch rates of cod.
- 9.4 For plaice in the North Sea, new information was available from the September BTS Survey. The analysis did not change the assessment but it resulted in a new recruitment estimate and a new forecast. The new perception was one of *higher* recruitment (2006 year class) – 29% higher, and a higher forecast, although the forecast was for SSB to continue to decline. The plaice advice from May 2007 was that to rebuild SSB to B_{pa} in 2009 landings should be restricted to 26 000 t. in 2008. The new advice was that to rebuild to B_{pa} in 2009 the landings should be restricted to 35 000 t in 2008.
- 9.5 For sole in the North Sea, new information was available from the September BTS Survey. The analysis did not change the assessment but it resulted in a new recruitment estimate and a new forecast. The new perception was one of *lower* recruitment (2006 year class) – 30% lower, and a lower forecast: the forecast was for SSB to continue to decline. The sole advice from May 2007 was that to rebuild SSB to B_{pa} in 2009 landings should be restricted to 13 900 t. in 2008. The new advice was that to rebuild to B_{pa} in 2009 the landings should be restricted to 9 800 t in 2008.
- 9.6 For Norway pout in the North Sea and Skagerrak, new information was available from 2 surveys (September 2007): the EGFS and the SGFS. Analysis by a seasonal assessment method led to a new perception of higher recruitment (2007 year class) ~ 50% higher than before, leading to a higher forecast. The advice in May 2007 was that the fishery should remain closed until information shows SSB approaching B_{pa} at beginning of 2008. The advice in October 2007 was that for a fishing mortality 0.35 the catch would be ~ 97 000 t (the SSB in 2009 rising above B_{pa}). The escapement strategy was for a catch of 50 000 t for the first half of 2008, with a revision in June 2008.

- 9.7 For sandeel in the North Sea, no advice was presented in June 2007 but new catch information was now available up to the summer of 2007, calibrated with commercial CPUE data. Analysis by a seasonal assessment method gave a perception of fishing mortality remaining low in recent years with stock size just above B_{lim} , but with the increased recruitment of 2004 and 2005 revised downwards (~14%) The SSB in 2006 was also revised downwards (~15%). The advice was that the fishery should only be allowed if monitoring information was available and showed that the stock could be rebuilt to B_{pa} by 2009.
- 9.8 There was new information for Haddock in the North Sea and Area IIIa from the IBTS q3 survey, but there was no change in perception and no change in the advice.
- 9.9 There was new information for Whiting in the North Sea and Eastern Channel from the IBTS q3 survey, but there was no change in perception and no change in the advice.
- 9.10 Martin Pastoors summarised the up-dating process which had been introduced as resulting in substantial changes in the advice because of sensitivity to the new recruitment estimates. The cod advice was that there was a stronger year class – we should let it live! For plaice there was an increase and for sole a decrease. There would be a review of Harvest Control Rules for sandeel and pout.
- 9.11 There was a strong reaction from some fishers' representatives to the new advice. In particular there was surprise that with the forecast for an increasing cod biomass the recommendation was to further restrict the cod fishery. It was pointed out that fishers had been pointing out for some time that cod numbers were increasing. Cod was now almost back to levels in the 1960s. Why had there been such a delay in scientists coming to the same perception?
- 9.12 There was particular anger over the suggestion, amplified in the press release from ICES, that additional control and enforcement was needed. Where was there evidence for illegal activities?
- 9.13 Environmental NGOs thought that the advice for restraint in fishing for cod made perfect sense. Unless spawning stocks could be rebuilt then the fishery would not be sustainable. They conceded however that there should be closer cooperation between scientists and fishers to improve the forecasts. Martin Pastoors believed that there was a problem. The survey results had been used to calculate the total removals. These estimates were bigger than the reported landings. There had been a removal of cod that could not be accounted for, and we did not know the source of those unallocated removals. The cod may have migrated out of the area, or there may have been an increase in natural mortality. In the past there had been unreported landings. In these circumstances it was not possible to translate the assessments into advice on the TACs. Cod is still at a very low level, especially in terms of the numbers of older fish. The cod now available could be caught, but if they were then they would not be able to reproduce.
- 9.14 Fishers opined that the surveys themselves might be at fault. The surveys might not be sampling in the areas where the cod actually are! The GOV trawl used in

the surveys was unable to catch cod. It is most unhelpful to say that the discrepancies are the result of illegal landings. Unless ICES was sure there had been irregularities in control and enforcement then it should not propose stronger controls.

- 9.15 It was not easy to accept forecasts which were able to change so rapidly in just a few months. Shouldn't strenuous efforts be made to improve the assessments? The abundance of cod in some areas had been apparent to fishers for some time. Scientists had perhaps done their best but we needed them to be more responsible in the way the advice was presented. There had been calls for more and more reduction in fishing. The reductions which had taken place had been underestimated and responsibility for that placed upon fishers. The advice was forgetting the realities of life at sea. The Commission would now continue to impose restriction on landings which would inevitably lead to more discarding.
- 9.16 Martin Pastoors spoke about the problems of assessing the amount of misreporting. There were known to be problems with unreported landings in a number of fisheries, but they were difficult to quantify; hence the reference to 'removals'. He recognized that there had been improvements in reporting and scientists were not sure that all the unallocated removals could be attributed to misreporting. It was a difficult problem for scientists to handle. There was debate within ACFM on how to handle the advice. ICES is guided in this by the Memorandum Of Understanding with the client. In the past forecasts had been over-optimistic. The approach adopted is essentially a precautionary one.
- 9.17 Fishers thought it was a pity that the Commission was not present for this discussion, so that options could be discussed in the presence of Martin. They appreciated the wishes of ICES to restrict itself to the science. However, it was then left to managers to take the decisions – and they were then accused of not following the scientific advice.
- 9.18 Some fishers thought there was a problem from seal predation. Increased numbers of seals would result in increased natural mortality of cod and this had not been accounted for.
- 9.19 There was a particular problem with the advice on plaice. A flatfish management plan was now in place, agreed with the NSRAC. Fishers had expected the advice this year to be tailored to that plan. With the plan it was intended that we move away from annual changes in the TAC and should be aiming for greater stability. Why was the ICES advice not related to the plan?
- 9.20 Martin Pastoors replied that the management plan had not yet been forwarded to ICES for comment. In these circumstances ICES could not formulate its advice in terms of a plan which it had not had a chance to assess.
- 9.21 Some fishers pointed out that the plaice surveys also suffered from the problem that the nets did not catch fish at the same rate as commercial gears. Was this problem of catchability taken into account? Martin Pastoors replied that with CPUE data a catchability factor was used. Data were scaled appropriately (although CPUE data were not used in the plaice assessment). The recruitment

survey was just used as an indicator of recruitment. It was just an indication of trends from one year to the next, measured with the same technology.

- 9.22 Fishers were very concerned at the failure of the Commission to ask ICES to frame their advice in terms of the management plan. It had been difficult for the industry to agree to the plan, but it had gone along with it because some benefits would be obtained, especially in terms of stability. Now we had learned that ICES had not even been asked to evaluate the plan. By December we should be operating to a plan agreed in April. It was proposed that the NSRAC should write to the Commission expressing concern at this omission and formally requesting the referral of the plan for assessment by ICES and a restatement of the advice in terms of the plan. Otherwise there would be fall-out from the industry from the knowledge that the agreed management plan had not been considered. It was agreed that the Chairman would write to the Commission expressing dismay. Nathalie Steins would draft a letter for rapid circulation to all parties. It was also agreed that a press release would be issued on this issue and sent to all parties for comment before it was sent out.
- 9.23 Finally, concern over the quality of the assessments was again expressed by all parties. Martin Pastoors was not entirely happy himself with the May/September revision arrangements. He thought that we needed to move to a situation where fishermen were not dependent on the latest year class. He was willing to discuss with fishers how this could be achieved. Fishers said they were prepared to help in providing more information from the fisheries.

10. Cod Recovery

- 10.1 The Dublin demersal WG had considered the non-paper from the Commission and a number of initiatives had been brought forward to promote the rebuilding of cod stocks. A drafting group had met to prepare a response and the Rapporteur had subsequently produced and circulated a text. That text was essentially a compromise between different views. It considered the two alternatives for rebuilding stocks proposed by the Commission, rejected both of these, expressed doubts about the efficacy of effort controls and proposed a new kind of governance based on incentives for fishers to take action to rebuild cod stocks. The paper expressed particular concern that emerging year classes of cod should not lead to discarding on a large scale. To promote the survival of these young fish the NSRAC had given its strong support to three initiatives:

A real time area closure pilot project

An observer programme pilot project

Individual vessel cod rebuilding plans

- 10.2 Amendments were discussed and agreed to the draft. In particular, it was agreed that the differences between the NSRAC and Commissions' positions did not amount to a 'third way' as proposed in the text. Rather, the NSRAC was proposing a fine-tuning and elaboration of the Commission's proposals. It was noted that the Commission's new non-paper on effort control did make provision

for cod avoidance plans. The NSRAC welcomed that non-paper; which amplified the Commission's position and indicated that the Commission was moving in the right direction.

- 10.3 It was agreed that the Rapporteur would revise the position paper from the NSRAC responding to the Commission's non-paper on cod recovery to reflect the comments made. He would also prepare comments on the non-paper on a New Approach to Effort Management under Annex II of the TAC Regulation. Both papers would be sent to ExCom members within a week, and members would then be given a week to respond with their comments.

11. Science/Industry Partnerships

- 11.1 Dr Kai Wieland of the Danish research institute (DIFRES) gave a presentation on cod surveys in the summer of 2007, using a commercial fishing vessel. Five surveys had been undertaken so far, but he would be reporting on the two most recent. One had been carried out in August and September in the north-eastern North Sea. The survey area was divided into 5 X 5 nmi squares. Some of these were selected randomly for the survey while the sampling position within each square was chosen by the skipper of the fly-shooting vessel (a modern version of the Danish seiner). Each fishing operation took approximately 2 hrs and fished an area of approximately 1 nmi².
- 11.2 Catches of cod had been high, rising to 3 t per tow. Such catches are not seen during the IBTS. The catches on sandy ground were lower than those on stony ground. The IBTS does not usually cover stony ground. The cod included a range of sizes, with 40-50 cm fish dominating.
- 11.3 The second survey had taken place in the Skagerrak. Here the catches were lower, but as the survey took place later in the year the effect may have been seasonal. Catches were again higher than in the IBTS with 27% of the tows yielding more than 500 kg of cod. There were a number of hot spots, where it would be impossible for fishers to avoid catching cod.
- 11.4 The IBTS only catches smaller cod; it doesn't catch the large fish seen in these surveys with a commercial vessel. The wide distribution of substantial catch rates in the commercial surveys, and the presence of large quantities of cod may suggest that the cod stock is in a better state than previously assumed. Catches to the west of Scotland had shown similar high densities of cod. It was hoped that further surveys would be conducted during 2008, and discussions were under way with Norwegian and Scottish colleagues to see whether such surveys might supplement the information provided by the IBTS.
- 11.5 Fishers welcomed this research, which instilled confidence because it had involved the participation of fishers themselves. Norwegian fishers were interested in the results as they used similar fishing methods in the North Sea. They had reached similar conclusions about the abundance of cod. In Norway, there was a reference fleet of commercial vessels from which results were collated. Martin Pastoors agreed that the surveys had been very useful and he hoped they would continue. The current surveys simply did not catch larger fish.

Partnerships between scientists and fishers were capable of revealing useful findings.

- 11.6 During 2008 the results would be presented to the ICES assessment working group, together with results from a personal log book programme. There was general agreement that a joined-up international programme of surveys with commercial vessels would bring benefits to the assessments. This had to be taken forward – perhaps starting with discussions at the planned Inter-RAC meeting with ICES in January. The NSRAC Science Sub-Group had already proposed that data workshops should precede the assessment working groups, to allow national institutes and other researchers to bring forward the results from science/fishery partnerships and to expand the data available to ICES scientists.
- 11.7 Kai Weiland concluded by asking the question 'if there are so many cod out there what should fishers do'? The Chair thanked Kai for his presentation which had given much food for thought.

12. Feedback from the NSRAC Working Groups

- 12.1 An important current issue in the area of spatial planning was the response of the WG to the Commission on the future approach to nature conservation in the North Sea and the proposal for a European network of marine protected areas. There had been discussion of this topic in Vienna, and a small drafting group had produced a text for the NSRAC to adopt. Dr Christian Pusch from the Bundesamt für Naturschutz wished to insert changes which he believed would improve the text. He pointed out that the procedure for designating sites was not especially German, but followed guidelines laid down by the Commission. Peter Breckling opposed these changes. He thought the text accurately described the actions taken in Germany to designate new Natura 2000 sites.
- 12.2 It was pointed out that the important aspect from the point of view of the NSRAC was to seek a level playing field amongst nations designating Natura 2000 sites, and adopting other measures under the Directive. The overall text of the paper was agreed by the ExCom with the proviso that Christian and Peter should agree the text which referred to Germany. The paper would then be sent out by the Secretariat. Members of the ExCom were reminded that a joint workshop on MPAs was planned with the NWWRAC and would take place in March of 2008.
- 12.3 The Wind Farm Focus group had been trying to find a common language and a protocol to establish early dialogue on the siting of wind farms. Progress was being made.
- 12.4 The Demersal WG had been preparing a response to the Commission's Policy Statement on Fishing Opportunities for 2008. There had been broad agreement on a response at the Dublin meeting in September. What was now needed was a formal paper from the NSRAC. The Commission's statement had presented a sensationalist view of fish stocks. It had underlined deterioration in the scientific advice, and had understated the recovery of cod stocks. It especially failed to deal with the problem of lack of uptake of quotas under the effort control regime. There was concern over the intervention of DG Environment in the setting of

TACs and concern over the mechanistic approach adopted when the assessments were weak.

- 12.5 It was agreed that the Rapporteur would turn the comments made during the WG and at the ExCom into a position paper. It should be produced within one week and members of the ExCom would then have a week to comment.
- 12.6 The Skagerrak and Kattegat WG had not received an adequate response from the Commission in its bid to introduce an effort management scheme in the Kattegat. There had been no support from the Commission and fishers were sceptical of its intentions. The WG had promised fishers that once it had agreed effort levels with the Commission there would be a process of consultation before the scheme was introduced. However, the last letter from the Commission in September had effectively delayed the procedure and had wished to impose strict effort limits because of fears about cod recovery. A letter had now been drafted for the NSRAC to send to the Commission warning that the effort scheme could not now go forward at the beginning of 2008 as planned.
- 12.7 The WG had received good scientific advice and would like to internationalise the surveys and science for the Skagerrak, with a reference fleet, better assessments and a changing attitude to the cod stock. Research on *Nephrops* was also important to the WG, which wished to work with scientists in preparing better stock assessments. Above all, however, the WG wanted to proceed with an effort management scheme in the Kattegat.
- 12.8 Fishers pointed out that the Commission was keen to mount projects aimed at a discard ban, which would also involve effort management. The effort scheme for the Kattegat would certainly qualify as that kind of project. However, it would be necessary first to discuss further what should be done with the fish which could not be marketed. It seemed that the Commission was no longer able to understand the details of the proposal coming forward from the WG because of changes in staff.
- 12.9 It was agreed that the draft letter prepared for the NSRAC should be adopted and sent out by the Secretariat.

13. Future Meetings

- 13.1 It is planned that there will be three ExCom meetings in 2008; the first on the 23-24th January, the second mid-year, and the third before the General Assembly in the autumn. Three meetings of the Demersal WG are planned, and two meetings of each of the Development Groups (10 in all). The Social & Economic WG will meet once. The Spatial Planning WG will have one meeting but will also hold a Workshop with the NWWRAC on Spatial Planning in March 2008. The Gill Net Focus Group will meet on the 15th November and provision will be made for 2 further Focus Group meetings as a contingency. The Inter-RAC WG is meeting with ICES in February. Plans are being made for a Data Workshop to take place in February or March, before the ICES Assessment WGs meet in May.

- 13.2 Members asked that the dates of these meetings be decided quickly and set out as a schedule of meetings to enable diaries to be prepared. There might be advantages from a cost and time standpoint in synchronizing dates and even locations with other RACs.
- 13.3 The General Assembly would be held in York, England, probably on 28th and 29th of October. An attempt would be made to synchronise the meeting with that of AIPCE (Ports & Auctions) which would also be meeting in York.

14. Administrative matters

- 14.1 The issue of membership of the ExCom by the European Transport Federation was discussed. The ETF had initially been keen to participate in the RACs and had even sought membership for all their national representatives. However, they were no longer attending NSRAC meetings and did not respond to correspondence. It was agreed that the Secretariat should write to the ETF once more, following it up with a telephone call, seeking a reply over continuing membership within 10 days. If no satisfactory outcome was achieved then the NSRAC would remove the ETF from membership of the ExCom.
- 14.2 During the meeting, those attending were inducted into the Guild of Christian IV, based in Aalborg. The Guild has more than 8 000 members including members of the Danish Royal Family.

15. AOB

- 15.1 There being no other business the interpreters were thanked for their services and the Danish co-organisers thanked for their work in preparing for the meeting. The Region of North Jutland was thanked for its excellent dinner.

16. Action Points

1. The issue of funding for the Development Groups preparing long term management plans needs to be discussed and resolved with the Commission (3.7).	Chair & Secretariat
2. The NSRAC would write to the Commission expressing concern at the failure to ask ICES to frame its advice on flatfish in terms of the flatfish management plan and formally requesting the referral of the plan for assessment by ICES and a restatement of the advice in terms of the plan (9.22)..	Nathalie Steins to draft and circulate and letter to be sent by Chair & Secretariat
3. The position paper from the NSRAC responding to the Commission's non-paper on cod recovery would be revised to reflect the comments made. It would be re-circulated to members who would then have 1 week to respond. The agreed paper would be sent to the Commission (10.3).	Rapporteur & Members. Secretariat then to send to Commission
4. A position paper from the NSRAC commenting on the	Rapporteur &

Commission's non-paper on a New Approach to Effort Management under Annex II of the TAC Regulation would be prepared and circulated to members, who would have one week to respond. The agreed paper would then be sent to the Commission (10.3).	Members. Secretariat then to send to Commission
5. A joined-up international programme of surveys with commercial vessels will bring benefits to the assessments. A proposal for such a programme will be discussed at the planned Inter-RAC meeting with ICES in January (11.6).	Chair & Secretariat
6. The NSRAC paper responding to the Commission on the future approach to nature conservation in the North Sea would be revised and the paper then sent to the Commission (12.2).	Peter Breckling & Christian Pusch. Secretariat to send completed paper to the Commission
7. A NSRAC paper would be prepared responding to the Commission's Policy Statement on Fishing Opportunities for 2008. The paper would be circulated to members with one week for a response and then sent to the Commission (12.5).	Rapporteur & Members. Secretariat then to send to Commission
8. A letter prepared by the Skagerrak & Kattegat WG in relation to the effort management scheme for the Kattegat would be sent to the Commission (12.9).	Chair & Secretariat
9. Dates for future meetings to be decided & circulated to members (13.2).	Secretariat
10. A letter will be sent to the ETF, followed by a telephone call, seeking a reply over continuing membership. If no satisfactory outcome is achieved then the NSRAC will remove the ETF as members of the ExCom (14.1).	Secretariat

17. In Attendance

ExCom Members

Christien Absil
 Michael Andersen
 Ann Bell (Secretary)
 Willem de Boer
 Hugo Andersson (Chair)
 Peter Breckling
 Barrie Deas
 Matthew Gianni
 Michel Goujon
 Tony Hawkins (Rapporteur)
 Konstantinos Kalamantis
 Jan Willem Wijnstroom
 Flemming Kristensen

Patrice Leduc
Michael Park
Guus Pastoor
Nathalie Steins
Henrik Svenberg
Pim Visser
Luc Corbisier
Bartek Kachniarz
Joyce Walker (Secretariat)
Gordon Lyon (NSRAC Communications Officer)

Observers

Julia Dennison	Elisabeth Vallet
Fred Normandale	Fredrik Lindberg
Mark Dougal	Bernt Andersson
Thord Monsen	Hilary Palevsky
Ann Kristin Westberg	Kasper Porsgaard
August Fjeldskar	Knud Andersen
Jesper Larsen	Morten Imer Moller
Bruno Hoffstadt	Derk Jan Berends
Kai Wieland	Francis Foulon
David Milne	Dominique Thomas
John Tait	Martin Pastoors
Ian McKay	Ole Lundberg Larsen
Alan W Addison	Anne-Sophie Christensen
Peter Bruce	Soren Anker Pedersen
Ronald Beagrie	Christian Pusch
James Thain	Henning Cyldenlen
Mike Mitchell	Niels Wichmann
Kim K Hansen	Doug Wilson
Lone Hansen	Jaw N Hansen