

The North Sea Regional Advisory Council



Fourth General Assembly Record of Meeting October 15th 2007, Aalborg, Denmark

Rapporteur: A D Hawkins

Draft Record

1. Welcome, Nominations & Apologies

- 1.1 The Chair of the General Assembly, Patrice Leduc, welcomed participants to the General Assembly of the North Sea Regional Advisory Council. This was the third anniversary of the NSRAC and it marked a transition between 2 stages of the NSRAC: juvenile and adult. The NSRAC was now up and running. It had gone through the stages of hatching and maturing and could now contribute to the biomass of EU fisheries. There had been a number of successes: the contribution to long-term management, the proposal for the Kattegat management scheme, the cod symposium and the workshop on technical conservation measures with the North West Waters RAC. Those who had given so much of their time to the NSRAC deserved our thanks, starting with Hugo Andersson, the Chair of the Executive Committee, the Directors and the Working Group Chairs. But our thanks also extended to those who had carried out the work of the NSRAC as members, observers or invited experts. All the organisations active in the NSRAC had renewed their membership and Aberdeenshire Council, to whom we should all be grateful, had committed to engaging with the NSRAC for a further 3 years. The European Commission had played its part and had now designated the RACs 'bodies who pursue a general Community interest'. These elements of stability should maintain the quality of the NSRAC and take us forward into the future. The fishing industry was currently in a difficult position with high fuel costs. Our priority was to secure the future existence of the industry.

- 1.2 Michael Andersen welcomed participants in the General Assembly to the Aalborg Region of Northern Jutland. Aalborg was the third largest region in Denmark. The Region would host a dinner tonight for the NSRAC.

- 1.3 Nominations had been received for the posts of Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the Executive Committee. Hugo Andersson was ratified as the nominee for the Chair, and Christien Absil and Michael Park as the nominees for the Vice-Chairs by consensus of the General Assembly.
- 1.4 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. Annual Report of the NSRAC

- 2.1 The rapporteur, Tony Hawkins, reviewed the work of the NSRAC over the past year. There had been a large number of meetings, although activities had been constrained by the reduced level of funding received by the NSRAC in its third year of operation. That financial problem had now been resolved by the designation of the RACs as bodies of Community interest. A particular feature of the year had been the Symposium on Cod Recovery, held on the 9th and 10th of March 2007 in Edinburgh, Scotland; organised jointly with the NWWRAC. It had been a great success, largely because it had been organised in the way that the RACs themselves wished. Against predictions, it had resulted in a general consensus being reached on cod recovery. It had emphasised that cod rebuilding plans had to be tailored to suit particular sea areas, cod stocks, and gear types. It had drawn attention to the need for partnerships between scientists and fishers to improve the quality of data and promote better mutual understanding. It had concluded that rebuilding plans should allow continued access to species which were abundant while enabling cod stocks to recover, and had stressed that fleets must be steered away from discarding newly recruited cod by providing incentives for the adoption of appropriate measures.
- 2.2 Through the year the Demersal Working Group had produced a series of position papers, including comments on the 2007 TACs and associated measures, the response to the flatfish management plan, a paper on discards, an interim paper on cod recovery and now a more formal paper on cod recovery. Other initiatives had included the formation of a gill net group, consideration of proposals on the devolution of effort management to member states, participation in a seminar on technical conservation measures and the formation of five development groups to prepare long term management plans for the key North Sea fisheries.
- 2.3 A Science Sub-group had identified a need for interaction with ICES at the Assessment Working Group stage to improve the quality of data and thereby improve the quality of the scientific advice. A proposal for a regional data workshop to precede the meetings of the ICES assessment working group had been forwarded to the Commission. A project with CEFAS in the lead was now aimed at mapping fishing effort in the North Sea, along with other data collection tasks. Fishers from England, Scotland, Denmark and France would help to validate high resolution maps of effort distribution. The Spatial Planning Working Group had met to consider wind-farm developments and had proposed a set of minimum standards and best practice guidelines for assessing *all* the potential impacts of a wind-farm. Such guidance would contribute to greater trust between

operators and fishermen and could be used to inform national policy. It would also assist fishing communities and fisheries associations when liaising with wind farm developers over the siting of new wind farms.

- 2.4 Natura 2000 sites were currently being proposed by member states. Once a site was proposed there was an immediate legal obligation to take action. The NSRAC intended to discuss this issue with the NWWRAC and hold a meeting on the designation of Marine Protected Areas.
- 2.5 The Socio-economic Focus Group had embarked upon a research project focusing on the collection of economic and social data from 3 UK ports, as a pilot for the wider collection of data relevant to assessing the impact of fisheries management measures upon fleets and communities. The Skagerrak/Kattegat Working Group had come forward with plans for an effort management scheme. Altogether it had been a very active year for the NSRAC.
- 2.6 The Executive Secretary, Ann Bell, presented a spreadsheet of the NSRAC accounts. These had still to be audited. The final regime would change as from the 1st November, when the NSRAC would become a body of Community interest. In the future 90% of the NSRAC budget would come from the Commission. A new budget for the forthcoming year had to be prepared for the end of the week. An interim financial arrangement had been agreed with the Commission as a bridging measure. It was pointed out that members of the General Assembly could not really comment on these accounts on the basis of a brief presentation.

3. Changes to the Rules of Procedure

- 3.1 A number of changes to the Rules of Procedure had been discussed at the Brussels General Assembly in 2006 and were shown in the copy presented to members. The Secretariat had taken the opportunity to consolidate the rules and re-number them. The various protocols which had been agreed over the first three years of the NSRAC had now been added as appendices.
- 3.2 The changes were agreed by the General Assembly and the Rules would now be passed to the Commission for their agreement. It was agreed that the Protocol for the Participation of Observers in the work of the NSRAC should be modified. The statement '*Active observers shall be allowed to speak and participate fully in discussions at the discretion of the Chair*' would be changed to '*Active observers shall be allowed to speak and participate fully in discussions*'.

4. Strategic Plan

- 4.1 The Chair of the ExCom, Hugo Andersson, presented the text of the Strategic Plan. A comment was made in relation to Item 5. It specified that '*The NSRAC shall only deal with fisheries in the North Sea (area IVa, IVb and IVc) and Skagerrak/Kattegat (area IIIa)*'. French fishers believed that the NSRAC should not restrict itself to this area. If there were events or activities taking place

outside this area but which affected the fisheries in the area then the NSRAC should be able to express a view.

- 4.2 It was also commented that the Strategic Plan abjured that the NSRAC should refrain from preparing advice on short term matters. There might be occasions where advice was required on a very short time scale. Hugo Andersson pointed out that it was difficult for the NSRAC to reply quickly on short-term issues, without holding a meeting. However, it could respond through written procedure if necessary.
- 4.3 It was pointed out that joint operations with other RACs were not mentioned in the Plan, yet these joint initiatives had been important in the past. The possibility for future operations should be mentioned. One example was the proposed joint meeting with the NWWRAC to discuss marine protected areas. It was agreed, however, that the RACs should not seek to take over the role of ACFA in dealing with more horizontal issues that applied to all areas.
- 4.4 The Strategic Plan also restricted the interest of the NSRAC to demersal fisheries. That was not entirely appropriate as there would be occasions when the NSRAC would wish to comment on industrial fisheries in its area. Hugo Andersson informed the meeting that the Pelagic RAC had asked if it could take responsibility for the Norway pout fishery. Currently, it was clear that responsibility for Norway pout and sand-eels rested with the NSRAC. Danish fishers thought that sand-eels too might be transferred to the Pelagic RAC and they believed that there was a strong case for the Pelagic RAC to take the lead on both species.
- 4.5 It was emphasised by others, however, that the NSRAC should be able to comment on any fishery taking place within the North Sea. For example, an industrial fishery might have widespread effects on the ecosystem, thereby affecting other key fisheries. The sand-eel fishery was strongly connected with the demersal fisheries. The responsibility for Norway pout and sand-eels had not been given by the Commission to the Pelagic RAC but to the NSRAC. We should not compromise the ability of the NSRAC to comment on the fisheries for Norway pout and sand-eels. It was agreed that the NSRAC would continue its discussions with the Commission and other RACs over Norway pout and sand-eels but would not relinquish its right to comment on the fisheries for these two species. There was provision under article 8 of the Decision for RACs to coordinate on matters of common interest. We would discuss this topic again at a future meeting of the ExCom, following further discussions at the Inter-RAC meeting.
- 4.6 It was agreed that under Item 2, Vision, the text should read '*A Council that really contributes to a successful fisheries management in terms of sustainability in ecological, economic **and social** terms, understanding and support by its members*'.
- 4.7 It was pointed out that there were advantages in the NSRAC meeting alongside meetings of the other RACs to reduce expenditure on travel and time. This should be considered when the coordination of RAC activities was discussed at the next Inter-RAC meeting. However, the Commission's advice was that

meetings should take place at locations where fishers could participate properly. That meant a fishing port – not Brussels or Madrid. Meetings close to fishery exhibitions could however provide an opportunity for fishers to participate.

5. Directors' Report

- 5.1 A report had been provided for the last meeting of the Directors of the NSRAC Company. A new communications advisor had joined the Secretariat – Gordon Lyon. Gordon was a Communications Officer with Aberdeenshire Council and he would be seconded to the NSRAC. The NFFO Communications Officer – Julia Dennison – would also be able to assist on stories and reports. All material would be circulated to members, so that they could edit and translate them for their own fishers.
- 5.2 Young fishers from the RACs had attended the ICES Annual Science Conference and will report back to future ExCom meetings. The fishers concerned had seen this as a good first step in integrating fishers into the science. Fishers would be permitted to present a paper of their own at the next Annual Science Conference in Nova Scotia.

6. Membership

- 6.1 Ann Bell informed the General Assembly that the European Transport Workers' Federation (ETF), a member of the General Assembly, with a seat on the Executive Committee had not attended meetings. The ETF represented employees in the fishing industry across Europe. The Secretariat had written to the ETF asking it to consider its position.
- 6.2 There was discussion of the next step to be taken. It was agreed that we should not leave seats unfilled on the ExCom. If organisations did not attend, or did not pay their fees, and did not reply to correspondence, then they should be asked to withdraw from the NSRAC.
- 6.3 The ETF had written to the Commission saying that they would withdraw from the RACs if they did not receive stronger representation within them. The Commission had replied asking for alternative solutions to their participation, in the context of the review of the RACs. The Commission's view was that if the ETF wished to take part in the RAC then they could not be excluded. It was noted, however, that although membership of the General Assembly was the concern of the Commission and member states, membership of the ExCom was for NSRAC members to decide.
- 6.4 It was agreed that the Secretariat should write again to the ETF, asking them if they wished to continue as members of the RAC, or whether they wished to withdraw. If they did not respond to the letter, then NSRAC members would no longer support their membership of the ExCom. A spare seat would then become available in the 'fisheries' category on the ExCom.

- 6.5 There was currently a spare seat on the ExCom in the 'others' category. There were three organisations applying to fill this single seat and the NSRAC would need to decide between them. Presentations were first given by all three applicants.
- 6.6 Elisabeth Vallet, the European Programme Manager for the Seafood Choices Alliance described the alliance. It is an international, non-profit making organisation which works with all players to achieve sustainable markets for seafood. It works with consumers, restaurant owners, fish merchants, environmental organisations, fish farmers and fishers themselves to transform the seafood marketplace into one that is environmentally sustainable and economically profitable. It had originally been a US organisation based in Washington DC but now had offices in London and Paris. NSRAC members were invited to attend their annual conference and seafood summit in Barcelona on January 27-30th 2008.
- 6.7 Luc Corbisier and Luc Mellaerts described the work of the Belgian Foundation for Sustainable Fisheries (Stichting voor Duurzame Visserij Ontwikkeling, SDVO). This is a separate organisation to the one already represented on the NSRAC. Vessel owners are grouped into a Producers' Organisation called the 'Rederscentrale' which is already a member of the NSRAC for Belgium. The Foundation works in parallel with Rederscentrale and is half-way between an NGO and a PO. The SDVO handles contributions from the Flemish government for various projects, some of them ecological in nature. Essentially, Belgian fishers, who take more than 65% of their landings from the North Sea, are seeking a second seat on the NSRAC through the Foundation.
- 6.8 Knut Andersen gave a presentation on the Danish Society for a Living Sea. The organisation positioned itself between environmental organisations and the fisheries. It had started in the 1980s with concern over the dumping of chemicals in Danish waters. It had now established its own rules for sustainable fisheries and worked with other conservation organisations. Its membership included fishers. The Society was committed to the North Sea and had a lot of experience of working in this area. The NSRAC was an important body which could influence decision taking and the Society wished to be part of it.
- 6.9 It became evident during discussion that the SDVO was seeking a seat on the ExCom as a fishers' organisation. As the vacant seat which was currently vacant was in the 'others' category the SDVO was not eligible to fill it. Consideration of its bid for membership of the ExCom would have to wait for a vacant seat becoming available in the 'fisheries' category. As the position of the ETF had still to be clarified there was currently no vacancy to be filled. It was agreed by a clear majority, however, that should a seat in the 'fishers' category become vacant during the year then the SDVO should be asked to fill that seat.
- 6.10 The Danish Society for a Living Sea was not a fishers' organisation, although it did have fishers as members. It was eligible to apply for the vacant seat in the 'others' category.
- 6.11 The Seafood Choices Alliance was not yet a member of the NSRAC General Assembly. Its application would have to be agreed by member states before it

could be considered a member (see paragraph 15 of the Rules of Procedure). Once it had been confirmed by the concerned member states as a member it would be eligible to compete for the vacant seat in the 'others' category.

- 6.12 The chairman, Patrice Leduc, concluded that in the circumstances it was not sensible to take an immediate vote on the occupancy of the vacant seat in the 'others' category. We had to seek the view of member states on membership of the General Assembly by the Seafood Choices Alliance before it could be considered for membership of the ExCom. We would have to wait for confirmation of their membership of the GA. In the meantime, both the Danish Society for a Living Sea and the Seafood Choices Alliance were free to attend NSRAC meetings as observers, and to participate in discussions. Their participation would allow other members to observe the contribution that they were able to make to the work of the NSRAC. The NSRAC would then vote in due course on the issue of which organisation should occupy the vacant seat.
- 6.13 It was suggested that future applicants to join the NSRAC should be told that their membership would have to be confirmed by the concerned member states, and that this would result in a delay of perhaps 6 weeks or more. Membership of the ExCom required an organisation to be an already agreed member of the NSRAC.

7 2008 Work-Plan

- 7.1 A series of priorities for the 2008 Work-Plan had been put forward. They were, in no particular order of priority:

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

- 7.2 Participants in the General Assembly were then asked by the Chair to give their opinions on whether they were properly represented and listened to by the NSRAC.
- 7.3 One fisher's opinion was that the NSRAC had done well and had adequately represented the views of fishers on cod recovery and the need for adequate cod quotas. However, the NSRAC had not been listened to. As a result there was now considerable dumping of cod taking place. Others thought that there had been too few tangible successes for the NSRAC. We may have achieved quite a

lot for plaice, with an agreed management plan in place, but we would have to ensure that the Commission delivered on that.

- 7.4 Another remark emphasised that the current regulations were difficult to apply and extremely complex. They were currently unworkable. Good sizes of plaice were being dumped because of flaws in the management regime. We had to work towards a more flexible and adaptable regime. There was strong concern that scientists and managers were completely out of touch with reality. Fishers were concerned for their future and were currently asking what they could do to combat high fuel prices, which provided an additional threat to their livelihood.
- 7.5 It was suggested that the main problem with the CFP was over governance. The RACs are important in transferring greater responsibility to stakeholders. However, we now had to convince fishers themselves that the RACs were important and that they could influence the thinking of the Commission. A good example was the margin of tolerance issue, where RACs had written to the Commission making a clear case for relaxation of the 8% figure, which could not be complied with. The Commission had to follow this issue up. If there was a relaxation in the margin of tolerance then the RACs could proclaim a success.
- 7.6 The processing trade was especially concerned with the need to connect fishers to scientists. It did great harm to markets when scientists and fishers disagreed. The market needed fish of high value and quality, fished in the right way. Currently the wrong image was being given to consumers. Sourcing of fish took place from all over the World. The market for North Sea fish could easily be lost.
- 7.7 Michael Mitchell from the Food and Drink Federation said that his company spent more than £1M per day on fish. Sustainable sources were required. Processors used to leave the management of fisheries to others. Now they recognised that they had to take part in the debate. Major retailers were greatly affected by reports in the media. Brand reputation was often at stake. Industry was increasingly engaging in the technical and scientific issues. There were concerns over the legality of seafood, the sustainability of the fisheries and wider ecological issues.
- 7.8 There was strong agreement that fishers, processors and experts, including scientists, needed to work together to achieve common ground on the management of fisheries. It was recognised that changes in the relationship between fishers and ICES were necessary to make things better.
- 7.9 Knut Andersen said that off North Jutland fishers could not avoid catching cod of all sizes. More flexible regulations were needed to deal with this situation. Fuel prices were an issue too, but he thought that fishers ought to be aware of wider climate change issues. The seas around Denmark were already changing and some species might disappear from the area. We should also be showing solidarity with third World fishers. We are damaging the atmosphere with the CO₂ we are producing. We must plan to reduce our energy consumption.
- 7.10 Flemming Kristiansen had been a member of the NSRAC ExCom from the start and as a fisherman he had been very aware of the work of the NSRAC. The Danish industry was talking to scientists and had launched joint research projects

with them. We had to show that fishers were working towards fisheries which were sustainable. However, it was very difficult for fishers to understand why their sacrifices had not resulted in improvements.

7.11 Emmanouil Papaioannou summed up for the Commission. The Commission wanted the RACs to succeed and had supported their move towards greater financial responsibility. He would report to colleagues the remarks made about the discarding of cod. On the effort regime in the Kattegat, on which progress had been slow, the Commission needed to have a clear position from the RAC. On the margin of tolerance issue, the Commission was preparing a response. On scientists and fishers there were opportunities for greater cooperation. He would be giving the Commission's priorities later today at the Executive Committee meeting.

8. Any Other Business

8.1 There being no other business Patrice Leduc thanked the interpreters for their services and the Danish co-organisers for preparing for the meeting. .

9. Action Points

1. The General Assembly nominated Hugo Andersson as Chair of the ExCom, and Christien Absil and Michael Park as the Vice-Chairs (1.3).	ExCom
2. The Rules of Procedure agreed by the General Assembly would now be passed to the Commission for their agreement (3.2).	Secretariat
3. The NSRAC will continue its discussions with the Commission and Pelagic RAC over Norway pout and sand-eels but will not relinquish its right to comment on the fisheries for these two species. This topic will be discussed again at a future meeting of the ExCom, following further discussions at the Inter-RAC meeting (4.5).	Secretariat & Chair
4. The Secretariat will write again to the ETF, asking them if they wish to continue as members of the RAC, or whether they wish to withdraw. If they do not respond to the letter then they no longer have the support of NSRAC members in their membership of the ExCom. A spare seat will then become available in the 'fisheries' category on the ExCom (6.4).	Secretariat & ETF
5. It was agreed by a clear majority that should a seat in the 'fishers' category become vacant during the year then the SDVO should be asked to fill that seat (6.9).	Secretariat
6. The view of member states will be sought on membership of the General Assembly by the Seafood Choices Alliance (6.12).	Secretariat
7. The NSRAC will vote in due course on the issue of which organisation should occupy the vacant 'others' seat on the	Secretariat

10. In Attendance

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)
Luc Mellaerts
Emmanouil Papaioannou
Svend-Erik Andersen
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
Mike Mitchell
Ian McKay
Alan W Addison
Ronald Beagrie
James Thain
Peter Bruce