International Council for the
Exploration of the Sea

C.M. 2002/Del:21

DRAFT

REPORT OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE ON THE ADVISORY PROCESS

30 September 2002

1 OPENING

The Chair, Gerd Hubold opened the meeting at 10 am, 30 September 2002 at DGI byen, Copenhagen.

2 ADOPTION OF ADENDA

Hein Rune Skjoldal suggested to have a short list of all non-recurrent request as a help when discussing the workplans for the advisory committees. The Chair said that he planned to finish all agenda items except point 12 (Rethinking the ICES Advisory Committee structure) before 4 pm. At that time MCAP would be joined by the President and several Bureau members and he would discuss point 12 with those also present.

With these comments the Agenda was adopted

3 AGENDA ITEM 3 OPENING THE ADVISORY PROCESS TO OBSERVERS

MCAP considered Doc. No 3 (Observers to the Advisory Committees). This is a draft for a Delegates paper that MCAP has been asked to comment upon.

The Chair introduced the proposal for the Delegates (draft Del:15). In January 2002 MCAP considered that the advisory committees must be opened to observers.

Furthermore, MCAP considers that the observers also should have access to the expert groups (Study Groups and Working Groups). Tore Jakobsen felt that there could be a number of problems with local interests in relation to fish stock assessment working groups. Furthermore, MCAP found that while it might be possible to run advisory meeting with participants having different status ICES should accept that the observers as an integral part of the SG/WGs. The filter should be on advisory level.

It was decided that MCAP would support the general issue of admitting observers and then recommend that clear rules and procedures should be determined for this process.

Jake Rice stated that on the basis of experience in Canada, when the advisory process is opened to observers there will be a flood of applications. There was general agreement that ICES needs to be able to limit the number of observers to each meeting. This meant that rules 7 and 8 should be reconsidered.

7. An NGO which has been granted representation under Rules 8 and 9 must inform the General Secretary of the names and addresses of not less than three possible observers together with information on their scientific qualifications and field(s) of expertise. ICES must receive this information not later than two months before the Advisory Committee meeting.
8. ICES will select the most appropriate observer from among the names submitted, and inform the Non-Governmental Organisation within [two] [three] [four] weeks of receiving the list of nominees.

It was felt that there would be problems if ICES were to choose the actual persons attending. The NASCO process would be better, because the NGOs themselves choose who will make a statement on behalf of the other groups.

It was proposed that ICES set a limit for the various types of NGOs and then leave it to the NGOs to determine which organizations are actually represented. One way of implementing this would be to send out the terms of reference for the relevant meetings after they have been agreed by the Delegates. After the applications for sending observers have been received, they can be sorted by type of observer and the lists sent to the groups. The requests for observership should be accompanied with a statement of the reasons for their desire to participate. The organisations that want to become observers would then among themselves choose those who will actually attend.

To illustrate this process is might be considered that the environmental NGOs should submit the names of potential participants and ICES will decide that up to two persons can be accommodated; similarly the industrial NGOS should submit the names of potential participants and for this group ICES decide that it can accommodate up to three persons. ICES would then communicate these decisions to the applicants and ask them among themselves to nominate the actual participants.

With these comments, MCAP endorsed the Delegates paper on observers. However, realistic rules for the number of observers in meetings should be developed.

Proposed revised text

7. An NGO which has been granted representation following rules 6 and 8 must inform the General Secretary of the name and address of the observer(s) together with information on their scientific qualifications and field(s) of expertise at least [four weeks] before the meeting. ICES may reject an observer on the basis of lack of appropriate scientific qualifications or irrelevant field(s) of expertise.
8. ICES will decide on the upper limit of observers that can be allowed in a meeting. ICES will inform the applicants that have been deemed qualified as observers under rule 6 about this upper limit and will ask the applicants to select among themselves the most appropriate observers, and inform ICES on the selection at least [three] [two] weeks prior to the meeting.

This text will also replace rules 14-15 and 22-23 (replace NGOs with Fishermen associations)

Advisory Committees should be encouraged to review the effects of the admission of observers and identify any problems that may have occurred.

4 MODIFYING THE PEER REVIEW/QUALITY CONTROL SYSTEM

Within MCAP, there are several review processes discussed under the heading of "external review". MCAP in January 2002 proposed a framework for an external review of the entire advisory process but this was not implemented as funds were not available. The proposal presented in Doc. No. 4 concerns the review process of draft advice and its scientific basis, e.g. the fish stock assessments and the advice based on these assessments. The issue is whether this should be done internally in the advisory committee (as is current practise) or whether this process should involve external reviewers.

MCAP considers that external reviewers should be involved in this review process. Also, the Chair reported that the clients would like to have a peer review of the reports as part of the advisory system.

Doc. No. 4 proposes to move this review process out of the advisory committees and have the reviews done by scientists working from their home laboratories. Tore Jakobsen said that while this expansion of pool of reviewers would be useful for ACFM, the proposal was not supported by ACFM, as individuals who are preparing the advice need to review the quality of the assessments themselves to be sure that they support the results of the assessments. So the saving in time will be very small. Stig Carlberg informed MCAP that the peer review in ACME is done on the basis of draft sections of the report that are distributed several weeks in advance of the meeting, giving each member of ACME a chance to have experts in their countries to review the material. This does not also work well in practice owing the short time available. Jake Rice stated that the system of peer review set up in the USA is costly and does not ensure better quality because some of the reviews create problems in themselves owing to the bias of the reviewer. Time savings could better be made by having working group members come to the working group meetings with their stock assessment runs already complete, which would give the working groups more time to review the assessments in more detail. Hein-Rune Skjoldal considered that the reviews are among the tasks of the advisory committees. At present, peer reviews are already being done in the laboratories, so the system proposed in MCAP Doc. No. 4 simply reflects the current situation.

MCAP concluded that proposal should not be supported. However, ICES must ensure that the advice that it provides has been adequately peer reviewed according to an agreed system. MCAP concluded that external reviewers should be introduced to the review process starting with ACFM. This will require additional funds to hire external experts to prepare the peer reviews.

Having this review done in public involving the stakeholders was reviewed. One model is the assessment consultations made jointly with the North Sea Commission Fisheries Partnership as conducted in August 2002. These consultations only considered three stocks in the North Sea and are costly. Finally this system only has financing until 2005. It is clear that ICES cannot finance such a system within the present constraints.

It was noted that the admission of observers into the advisory committee system may lessen the demand for more external peer review. If this does not prove to be the case, it may indicate that the basis for the national representation on the advisory committee is not providing the anticipated results of common ownership of the advice.

MCAP considered that a first step would be to invite a few (2-3) external experts to take part in the reviews done in the ACFM subgroups. As was said above this would require additional funds and MCAP discussed how such funds could be found.

It was proposed that the travel and per diems for national representatives at Advisory Committee meetings be paid by the national governments instead of by ICES and some of these savings could be used to pay for some external peer reviewers. However, it was noted that the MOUs with the Commissions includes payment for the participation of members at the Advisory Committee meetings thus no actual savings would be made.

It was agreed to return to this suggestion under agenda item 12.

5 AGENDA ITEM 5 INTERNAL REVIEW OF THE ADVISORY PROCESS

5.1 FOLLOW-UP OF THE REPORT OF THE STUDY GROUP ON ACFM WORKING PROCEDURES

MCAP reviewed the SGWP report and its recommendation and noted that the issues that MCAP wanted to bring forward had been covered under various specific agenda items. Several proposals were not relevant to MCAP.

It was noted that participation in the meeting of SGWP was biased towards the North Sea with little participation from other parts of the ICES area. The proposal of a regional advisory structure was discussed, ACFM did not see this as useful because the consistency issue.

Doc. No. 8 presents proposed TORs for a new study group on ACFM and working group protocols. The Chair of ACE reported that ACE has proposed that a study group be set up to review the working group system in terms of how ecosystem issues can better be handled in ICES. There is a need to review the working group structure to make the best use of these groups in relation to the developing ecosystem requirements.

MCAP agreed that it would be best to have a joint group to look at the entire system, given the overlap between ACE and ACFM on some fisheries issues. Members of this study group should include the Chairs of ACFM and ACE, along with the Chairs of a number of key working groups, also ensuring that a broad geographical spread of representation is included. MCAP considered that it would aim for a meeting of 3 days.

It was proposed that this group also deal with the support that the Secretariat provides to the working groups, including the provision of data or data handling.

H. Lassen will with work with H.R. Skjoldal to redraft the recommendation to expand the TORs for the SG.

5.2 BENCHMARK ASSESSMENTS

In reviewing the SGWP report the issue of benchmark assessments was discussed. It was noted that for a number of stocks, a benchmark assessment would be possible. It was proposed that a list of stocks for which benchmark assessments would be feasible and practicable should be prepared for ultimate decision by MCAP later this week, but the final choice of stocks should be made by ACFM. Further documentation of this process should not use the word "benchmark".

MCAP agreed that ICES should start to move in the direction of the benchmark model and asked the ACFM chair to develop a proposal, see annex IV.

MCAP agreed that a recommendation should be developed (Jake Rice, Tore Jakobsen and Hans Lassen) to go to the Delegates.

6 MOU AND ICES COMMITMENTS

The Chair noted that this topic had been on the agenda in January. WGCOOP had not moved forward on this issue and ICES had agreed to roll-over the existing MoUs for another year. The Chair re-emphasised the need for a specific commitment from national laboratories to provide the information as specified in the MoUs and that the MoUs should reflect that ICES can only commit itself as far as the national inputs are forthcoming. It was pointed out that since the MoUs were first negotiated, a number of changes have occurred in the national activities that have a direct relevance to the ability of ICES to prepare the best advice, such as the cancellation of certain fish surveys.

7 JOINT NSCFP/ICES GROUP ON INCLUSION OF FISHERMEN'S INFORMATION

The meeting with the North Sea Commission Fisheries Partnership resulted in a realization by the fishing industry that they need to make an effort to make better information available from the fishermen and that this information should be provided in a way that can be used by ICES in assessments. There is a proposal for a new Study Group on fishing industry information to develop this process further, deciding the types of information that should be collected, coordinating data collection, and investigating the application of these new data in stock assessments.

MCAP adopted the proposal for this Study Group, which should report to ACFM. The ICES Co-Chair proposed is A. Rijnsdorp (The Netherlands).

8 ICES ROLE IN DEVELOPING RECOVERY PLANS

Doc. No. 11 presented a set of TORs for a proposed SG. MCAP confirmed that these TORs included the intentions expressed in January 2002 and forwarded the TORs for ACFM's consideration.

ACFM in its session on Wednesday 2 October agreed to rephrase these TORs and transfer the tasks to the SG on the further development of the Precationary Approach (SGPA).

9 REVIEW OF ACTIVITIES AND WORKPLANS FOR THE ADVISORY COMMITTEES (AGENDA ITEMS 9-11)

9.1 ACFM AND ACE MATTERS

The ACFM chair informed MCAP on the progress to elect a new ACFM chair.

Doc. No. 14 proposed that formulating the advice for North Atlantic salmon should be prepared by ACE instead of the current arrangement where ACFM prepares this advice. ACE had considered this proposal there was considerable reluctance owing to the lack of expertise on salmon in ACE and because the request is very technical and not related to ecosystem issues. ACE felt that ultimately more ecosystem considerations could be incorporated into the salmon request. However, there could be a possibility that ACE could take on salmon advice if adequate expertise could be made available to ACE. It was proposed that one or two representatives of ACE would work with NASCO to develop more relevant requests to incorporate the key ecosystem issues for salmon. At the June 2003 NASCO meeting, the Chair of ACE and the UK member of ACE should attend the NASCO meeting and discuss potential changes in the requests for advice.

MCAP accepted the view of ACE and asked ACFM to take on this task for 2003.

9.2 FISHERIES COMMISSIONS

An overview of the special requests for advice for 2003 was reviewed. It was noted that most of the special requests from the EC simply request that the standard advice be prepared in a somewhat different way than the usual way, so there will be no extra costs.

There was considerable discussion about the request for "timely provision of early warning" and what ICES was actually requested to do. There was some suggestion that this has implications for the internal working in ICES in terms the large amount of conservatism in the preparation of advice when situations have been identified that may have a large impact on recruitment or other key factors, but when the outcome is not certain at the time. It was also pointed out that there are vast differences of opinion among scientists concerning when an early warning should be issued. The general policy in ICES has been to be very careful in issuing such warnings, unless the situation is very clear. It was pointed out that in fisheries advice, ICES can only quantify after the fact, so it must be possible to use expert advice. In conclusion, it was decided that no general guidelines could be prepared for the issuance of early warnings; they should be considered on a case-by-case basis.

The EC request on the impact of industrial fisheries was considered to require work by both ACE and ACFM; no one committee can provide a full answer. There were diverse perspectives on how this request should be treated. Some felt that there is adequate information in the literature, so this issue should not be given to a working group but rather to the Advisory Committees. Others felt that although important work on this topic had been done in the past there was concern that the past work had considered the problem from a very narrow perspective and the topic should be considered by ACE and ACFM. It was proposed that a small group of three to four persons, e.g. one Spaniard, one Dane, one Norwegian, and one from the UK, should get together and coordinate/organise the response to this question. The Chair of ACE and the Chair of ACFM will each provide the names of two people who have expertise in this area to to collate the necessary information to be reviewed and adopted by both Committees; if these Committees do not adopt this text then MCAP will have to handle it. The draft of this advice should be ready by 1 April for review by the Advisory Committees. Each Advisory Committee should also appoint a small sub-group to approve any changes to this text in negotiation on the final text of the advice. It was felt that this request should be cost as a special request.

The revision of reference points for fish stocks was discussed in relation to several paragraphs from the Bergen Declaration from the Fifth North Sea Conference requesting the establishment of target reference points for all commercial fish stocks. It was felt that these are different activities, and ICES has not been requested to develop target reference points. In any case, scientific advice is only part of this process as societal goals also play a key role in this process. It was proposed that the issue of the definition of management objectives be brought up at the next WGCOOP meeting so that these objectives can be clearly defined. This is a task for ACFM, without additional cost to the EC.

The requests from HELCOM for a triennial review of the populations of marine mammals in the Baltic Sea and for a monitoring programme to estimate the abundance of marine mammals were noted. It was pointed out that the marine mammals working group has been in a state of flux for several years and there was concern that the meeting next year was scheduled to take place in Spain, however the main items for this working group are to respond to two requests from HELCOM for the Baltic Sea and several items from OSPAR regarding the development of ecological quality objectives in relation to marine mammals. MCAP agreed that the new Chair of the marine mammals working group should be consulted to determine whether the venue of the meeting could be changed to a country in the Baltic Sea for 2003, and postpone the meeting in Spain until 2004.

9.3 HELCOM

The request for advice was briefly reviewed noting that most of the issued had been discussed in January 2002.

Population seals and harbour porpoise. Delegates should make sure that Baltic scientists should be present at the meeting in Spain. Move the meeting to a Baltic Country (Poland?). Justification should notify Delegates on participation.

9.4 OSPAR

MCAP reviewed the request on the development of data products in relation to the OSPAR Common Procedure for the identification of eutrophication areas. MCAP must clearly inform OSPAR of whether there is an adequate amount of data available in the ICES data centre to be able to handle this item. In addition, ACME should follow this work more closely via the ACME sub-group that has been created to assist in this work.

10 RETHINKING THE ICES ADVISORY COMMITTEE STRUCTURE (AGENDA ITEM 12)

The meeting was at this point joined by several Bureau members: Joe Horwood, Mike Sissenwine, Pentti Malkki and Eduardo Lopez-Jamar. Also the General Secretary David Griffith joined the meeting at this point.

The Chair opened the discussion by presenting the paper no. 5 Rethinking the advisory structure. He stressed that he saw three problem areas:

- Consistency of advice
- Cost of the advisory process
- External pressure on transparency and peer review

The present structure is very costly: three full committees preparing scientific advice. If ICES continues with this system, then the three committees should be given enough money to conduct the work that they are required to do. MCAP cannot decide how many days each advisory committee should meet; as MCAP cannot steer the process in this detail. The proposal that the number of committees be reduced to one committee was made on the basis of cutting costs, ensuring consistency and simplifying the system. He finds that the WGs do good work and there were comments from Clients that ACFM had made the results "worse". He considers that more extensive use of the professional structure in the Secretariat should be made to prepare the advice. He also mentioned that MCAP was considering that ICES does not continue to pay travel and per diem for participants in the Advisory Committee meetings. The Chair pointed out that there are new processes, such as the admission of observers and the inclusion of external peer reviewers in the present system, that have implications for the advisory structure and these should be considered.

The President underlined that at this point in time he wanted to avoid a repeat of the rather lengthy discussion in the late 1990s that had let to the present advisory structure. The President also found that the advisory system should respond primarily to requests. This point of view was shared by Joe Horwood, Mike Sissenwine and David Griffith.

The General Secretary considered that although the finances are not satisfactory the situation is not so serious that they imply a restructuring of the advisory system. He did not consider that it would be possible to have a common definition of advice across the advisory committees: the nature of the questions coming from the environmental commissions is different from the questions from the fisheries commissions and they cannot be reconciled. He agreed that the present procedures are not cost-effective; the advisory committees need to make more use of a fast track approach, e-mail procedures, etc. Thus, we must examine the procedures used in the Advisory Committees and change them to make them more cost effective. ACFM has made a start in changing it procedures by using sub-groups and e-mail reviews and these should be used more broadly in the future.

Joe Horwood found that MCAP has already done a very important job in bringing the views of the advisory committees to Council and has promoted a good communication between the Council and MCAP. The question of quality and transparency is important, and some work has been done on this but it should be made more visible. The fish stock assessment working groups need to view their work more broadly and develop new procedures rather than doing the same thing each year. One of the reasons that the three advisory committees were formed was to be able to put issues to only one committee, and ICES is not any worse off in the area of consistency. Even though two of the advisory committees are meeting for only short time, this was recognized as being necessary to handle the topics that are given to them. There is a need for both ACME and ACE to handle their specific requests. J. Horwood stated that he felt that advisory committees should not do non-requested advice, however, there does need to be a linkage between the scientific and the advisory sides of ICES. He accepts the need for stability in funding. The 100 % cost recovery is a problem, savings might be used to reduce commissions payments. For the more scientific issues, ICES can produce the "advice" through the SCICOMs information send out through one of ICES technical publication, e.g. CRR.

M. Sissenwine stated that MCAP is making a lot of progress and will continue to make progress as time goes on. There are some serious considerations in relation to national representation, in terms of both expense and proper expertise. To have one overall committee that handles all advice would not be an improvement. The issue of cost recovery may be a temporary problem, and may be partly caused by the push by clients to get more for their money or by the scientists wanting to do more. Using the science part of ICES and publishing it in ICES publications would be a good way to get more of the ICES work out, but not specifically as advice. The question is then how functional groups like ACME and ACE can function with fewer issues to handle. One possibility could be to have ACE and ACME meeting only every second year.

The Chair of ACE stated that MCAP has not yet discussed Doc. No. 5 and, while it presents some interesting ideas, he found that it contained inaccuracies and misconceptions. He considered that the advisory committees have two additional functions 1) they are part of the quality insurances mechanism and 2) they provide compilation and evaluation of information from expert groups. He agreed that ICES needs to pay attention to the issue of consistency and the Advisory Committees and the professional staff at the Secretariat should have a role in ensuring that areas of potential inconsistency are identified. However, he did not see problems with consistency. He found that the compilation of material from several working groups would best be conducted by the advisory committee handling the request.

The Chair of ACME seconded the comments of the Chair of ACE and expressed disappointment that the document had been prepared without consultation with members of MCAP but rather was distributed two days in advance of the MCAP meeting. Reports of the advisory committees have the status of the official opinion of ICES and any alternative system would need to be clear as to the status.

The ACFM chair found that danger of giving inconsistent advice is real.

10.1 NATIONAL REPRESENTATION ON THE ADVISORY COMMITTEES

The President noted that the principle of national representation on the advisory committees developed from problems with the former ACMP, which did not have national representation. The issue of the full competence of the members of the committees with national representation is another issue. The national nominees are intended to serve as independent experts, to give them freedom of opinion as experts, so if the members will be paid for by their national administrations it is not clear whether they will act as independent experts.

The Chair felt that it makes no difference whether ICES or the national administrations pay for the travel and per diems of the members of the advisory committees; the scientists will act the same way regardless. The key problem is whether there should be three full committees with full national representation. It could be much more efficient to have expert groups with the final decision on the advice made by one full committee.

10.2 COST-EFFECTIVENESS

J. Horwood mentioned the costing and the efficiency issue and noted that MCAP should keep track of the cost issues. The cost issues can be somewhat tricky because cost savings may need to be shared with the commissions. In terms of a modality of operation for non-paid for advice, there are some scientific issues such as wind farms where there may be a need to prepare advice. This work should be done by a study group under the Marine Habitat Committee and published in an ICES publication rather than in the ACME report.

The Chair of ACE stated that the workload issue is an important consideration, particularly in ACFM, but there is also a need to increase the capacity in new areas such as ecosystem issues. He also felt that ICES should continue to provide advice on pollution issues and the other issues handled by ACME. The present system is reasonably efficient but better use could be made of the working groups. The advisory committees bring together material from a number of working groups and the amount of time spent by the advisory committees on these tasks can be estimated reasonably accurately. Also the amount of the Secretariat work apportioned to the advisory portion of working group reports can be estimated.

10.3 REVIEWS AND OBSERVERS

The Chair of MCAP stated that, pending acceptance by the Council, meetings of the advisory committees and hopefully also the working groups will be open to observers. In addition, MCAP is proposing the peer review system will be expanded with external reviewers. The Secretariat will then have a strong role in reshaping the advice before it is brought to the advisory committee for adoption.

The Chair of ACFM stated that the problem with having a super advisory committee is that there is no time for this extra level of review. He noted that the different advisory committees have different traditions but there is no competition between them. However, care must be taken not to have inconsistency between advice from the different advisory committees.

The MCAP Chair stated that the observers would contribute to the peer review and to remove doubts about the system. It has been stated that the working groups produce better work than the ACFM, so the new peer review system would permit the working group outcome to go forward more directly than at present.

Joe Horwood and the Chair of ACE found that we need to be clearer about how the reviews are conducted of the material from the working groups and we should make more effective use of the working groups that we now have. It was proposed to develop a short document of the present review quality system.

10.4 WHAT SHOULD BE ON THE TORS FOR THE ADVISORY COMMITTEES

The President, Joe Horwood and Mike Sissenwine agreed that the advisory committees should not get involved with the work of the SCICOMs. They realised the dual role of the WGs to function both in a scientific and an advisory role. They found that ICES need to take the hard line of 100 % cost recovery. Advice is responding to a specific request from a specific client.

The Present and Joe Horwood considered that it is clear that the advisory committees should not do fundamental science but rather should suggest work that could be done by science groups.

10.5 CONCLUSION

The Chair summarised the discussion: ICES would continue with the present system. The differences between the environmental and the fisheries advisory systems are due to the differences in the types of advice and the clients seem to be satisfied with their work. MCAP would continue to review the procedures but does not find it possible to cut back on the meeting time and need a stable funding system through ICES. MCAP will discuss cost recovery with the Client Commissions. As a general matter of policy the advisory Committees should not discuss non-paid issues; ICES should be careful not to use ICES funds to discuss non-requested advice. SCICOMs and advisory committees should come more together and better linkage be established. It might be necessary in the future to give more time to the SCICOMs at the ASC/Statutory meeting to promote this new role in the advisory process.

The Secretariat was asked to develop a short document of the present review quality system with special emphasis on the fish stock advice.

11 ANNEX I ANNOTATED AGENDA

Monday 30 September 10:00-18:00

DGI byen:Room 1

1. Welcome and opening the meeting

2. Adoption of the agenda

3. Opening the advisory process to external observers.

    a. ACFM

    b. Assessment Working Groups

    c. SCICOM and SCI WG (already open)

Annotation: MCAP is invited to comment on the proposed recommendation for Delegates considerations for rules on allowing observers to advisory process (expert groups, advisory committees).MCAP is invited to adopt the proposed rules for access to Assessment working group reports.

Documentation:

- MCAP report January 2002
- Proposed Rules for external participants to the advisory process
- Report of the Study Group on ACFM Working Procedures
- Report of the North Sea Commission Fisheries Partnership 26-30 August 2002
- Document no. 3

4. Modifying the Peer review/Quality control system

    a. External peer review based on 1) scientists working their home labs 2) industry The WGs are in the public domain- Disclaimer on the WG reports when sent out for review

Annotation: MCAP is invited to review document no. 4 and to consider adoption of the proposed recommendation.

Documentation:

- Study Group on ACFM Working Procedures
- Doc. No. 4

5. Internal review of the advisory process.

    a. Review of SGWP as a 1st step in this review

    b. Review of ACFM statement on SGWP (HL to forward Minutes)

Annotation: MCAP is invited to review the findings of the SGWP and ACFMs comments. MCAP is invited to consider the proposed TORs for an MCAP Study group on an internal review of ACFM and WG procedures. Conclusion on actions for the delegates

Documentation:

- Study Group on ACFM Working Procedures
- ACFM Minutes (May 2002)
- Doc. No. 8

6. MoUs and ICES commitments

Annotation: ICES has signed MoUs with fisheries commissions. These MoU are up for review in 2003. The original plan was to review these in 2002 but the Fisheries Commissions were not ready to do that and therefore a roll-over arrangement was agreed. To meet the obligations that ICES has based on these MoUs, ICES must internally ensure that resources are committed to the ICES advisory work. These resources come from national laboratories and while the MoUs with Fisheries Commissions contractually obliges ICES to provide certain products ICES does not have explicit commitments from the national authorities on how many and which types of resources countries are willing to assign to these tasks. Defining a policy around this problem becomes urgent, e.g. as DG Fish is pressing for an ICES position on "fast track" advice.

MCAP is invited to discuss this topic and to recommend to the Council how best to meet these obligations. MCAP is invited to propose amendments to the MoUs.

Documentation:

- Doc. 13 Doc. MoUs with Fisheries Commissions

7. Joint NSCFP/ICES Group on inclusion of fishermen's information in the assessment.

Annotation: MCAP is invited to review and adopt the proposal for a Joint NSCFP/ICES Study Group on the use of information from fishermen in assessments.

Documentation:

- Doc. 10. Report of the NSCFP Consultation 26-30 August 2002
- Doc 9 Proposal for TORs for a SG on Fishers information

8. ICES role in the recovery plans (SG TORs)

Annotation: MCAP is invited to review and adopt the proposal for a SG on development of a framework for rebuilding plans

Documentation:

- Doc. No. 6. MCAP January 2002 report
- Doc no. 11. Proposal for TORs for a SG on development of a framework for rebuilding plans

9. ACFM requests
    a. Short review of activities
    b. Workplan 2003

Annotation: The ACFM chair will provide a short overview based on the consultations held on 29 September 2002.

10. ACE

    a. Short review of activities

    b. Workplan 2003

Annotation: The ACE chair will provide a short overview based on the consultations held on 29 September 2002.

11. ACME

    a. Short review of activities

    b. Workplan 2003

Annotation: The ACME chair will provide a short overview based on the consultations held on 29 September 2002.

12. Rethinking the ICES Advisory Committee structure

    a. Rethinking the AC structure with three committees ACE is competing with ACFM

    b. There is no need nor justification for three fully ICES funded advisory committees. If we establish an external peer review process to review the WG result a major part of the AC tasks has been dislocated to this process (ACFM about 30-40 %). Paper work to be done by a secretariat

    c. Future role and composition of MCAP (delegate members, less from AC, client commissions)

    d. Develop MCAP to supervise the AC (National representation) which would then be expert committee working under general instructions from MCAP

    e. Reduce MCAP to a coordination group (three chairs) between the three Acs

    f. MCAP is a subgroup of the Council similar to the Bureau, which specifically deals with the politics of ICES advisory role

Annotation: The present advisory committee structure appears to be costly and cumbersome. The rpocess has bee criticised both internally and externally. MCAP is invited to consider Doc. No. 4 and the recommendations proposed in this document. MCAP is invited to adopt the recommendations with a view to implement the proposals in 2003 and in 2004.

Documentation:

- Report of MCAP January 2002
- Doc. No. 5. Rethinking the Advisory Structure

13. Next MCAP meeting

Annotation: The next MCAP meeting should be held for 1 day after the advisory committees consultations and during the 91th ASC in Tallinn in 2003

14. AOB

15. Closing

Document list

Document No	Title	Author
1	Draft Annotated Agenda	
2 (This paper)	Document list	
3	Proposal for the Admission of observers to ICES Advisory and Expert Groups	Del:15
4	Review of results from expert groups - the Review/Quality Control Process	Secretariat
5	Rethinking the ICES Advisory Structure	MCAP Chair
6	MCAP Report January 2002	
7	Report of the Study Group on ACFM Working procedures February 2002	
8	Proposal for TORs for a SG on ACFM and WG working protocol	
9	TORS for SG on Fishers Information in Assessments	
10	Report of the NSCFP meeting 26-30 August 2002	
11	TORs for a SG on the framework for rebuilding plans	
12	Fast Track Advice	Secretariat
13	MoUs with Fisheries Commissions	
14	North Atlantic salmon Advice 2003	Secretariat
15	Minutes of ACFM May 2002	
16	Minutes of ACME June 2002	
17	Minutes of ACE June 2002	
18	Cost of Services to be provided by ICES for HELCOM in 2003 for scientific information	
19	OSPAR Requests	
20	Draft Letter from DG Fish on advice on Fishery Management in 2003	DG Fish

21	Follow up of the ministerial declaration from the fifth North Sea Conference	Letter from Norwegian Royal Ministry of Environment
22	ICES WG/SGs in relation to the need for scientific information and advice on marine ecosystems	ACE chair
23	Summary of non-recurrent Requests from Fisheries Commissions, OSPAR and HELCOM	

12 ANNEX III PARTICIPANTS

Gerd Hubold (MCAP Chair)

Tore Jakobsen (ACFM Chair)

Hein Rune Skjoldal (ACE Chair)

Stig Carlberg (ACME Chair)

Jake Rice (CONC Chair)

Janet Pawlak (Environment Adviser)

Hans Lassen (Fisheries Adviser)

For the discussion of agenda point 12 (Rethinking the Advisory Structure) the meeting was joined by Bureau members: Joe Horwood, Mike Sissenwine, Pentti Malkki and Eduardo Lopez-Jamar. Also the General Secretary David Griffith joined the meeting at this point.

13 ANNEX IV REVISING THE ICES ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

A system with Full and Update Assessments

Proposals Subject to Discussions with Client Commissions

Each year ICES reviews the status about 150 stocks. There are analytical assessments for about 70 of these stocks. At present all stocks are assessed each year with the exception of Nephrops (17 stocks) and Deep water fish stocks (about 10 species) that are assessed every second year.

Presently the full structure of the assessments is thoroughly analysed by the WGs and sometimes changed every year. This may cause major problems for the Clients if it results in major changes in the perception of the state of the stock and is introduced without substantial documentation of the need for changes in the assessment. Therefore, ACFM needs to be restrictive in allowing changes and to have a strict policy ensuring that the necessary documentation and reviews are in place.

The workload of ACFM and its WGs is very high. In order to use the limited resources more effectively, a way forward is to replace the present system of equal attention to all stocks each year by focussing on selected stocks in a particular year and apply update assessments to the other stocks. By allowing more time to focus on a particular stock, it will be possible to undertake a more thorough analysis of the assessment.

In principle a procedure where stocks are subject to a full analysis at regular intervals could apply to all stocks. However, it is realised that there are stocks, e.g. under rebuilding, that requires more frequent full assessments. These stocks are placed on a special observation list, which is visited each year.

Proposal

Future fish stocks assessments in ICES will be structured according to the following principle:

- The ACFM report shall each year document the full range of stocks.

- Stocks are classified in two groups: those stocks that are under ordinary assessment procedures and those that are on an observation list.

- Stocks are placed on the observation list by ACFM. Both WGs and Clients can request ACFM to place a stock on the observation list. ACFM will at each meeting review this observation list. Criteria for having a stock on the observation list include *inter alia*: that the stock is subject to a rebuilding plan, is at very low level or that there are indications of major changes in the stock status from surveys or the fisheries.

- Stocks on the observation list are fully assessed every year.

- Stocks not on the observation list will be subject to a full assessment at least every 5 years. In other years the assessments will be of the update type.

- For stocks not on the observation list, ACFM will agree (based on a proposal from the WG) on the assessment specification. This specification includes the following

    - Choice of assessment model including settings of the model;

    - Compilation of the basic data for the model, e.g. catch-at-age, mean weights, maturity ogives;

    - Choice of surveys and commercial cpue series to be used in the assessment and procedures for deriving these indices;

    - Procedures for projection in the short and medium term;

    - PA reference points;

A full assessment includes an analysis of the appropriateness of all elements in the assessment model described above. This analysis will be done by the assessment WG responsible.

An update assessment includes: updating all relevant time series and using the agreed assessment model to update all calculations including short and medium term forecasts as appropriate. Deviations can be accepted only if based on well documented evidence of a problem with the basis for the assessment model, e.g. that a prediction procedure becomes invalid.

Stocks on the observation list will be subject to a full assessment every year.

Assessments of stocks on the observation list will be reviewed by ACFM. When ACFM decides to place a stock on the observation list the following review of the assessment of this stock should involve an external reviewer. For stocks that remain on the observation list for a longer period, the review will only involve external reviewers at intervals of 3 years.

Update assessments of stocks not on the observation list will be reviewed internally by ACFM and the review will primarily only constitute a check that specified procedures have been followed. However, the reviewers will also consider whether the stock should be subject to a full assessment.

The full assessment done every 5 years of stocks that are not on the observation list, shall be reviewed by a group that includes external reviewers (external to ACFM).

14 ANNEX V NSC FISHERIES PARTNERSHIP CONSULTATION MEETING WITH ICES

ICES HQ, Palægade 2-4

Copenhagen, Denmark, 26th – 28th August 2002

Summary

For the first time, ICES met with an international team of scientists and North Sea fishing industry representatives to give them the opportunity to review the fish stock assessments for North Sea cod, plaice and saithe. The meeting was

organised at ICES Headquarters in Copenhagen by the North Sea Commission Fisheries Partnership, which brings scientists and fishermen together from around the North Sea.

The Partnership was provided well before the meeting with extracts from the Report of the Working Group on the Assessment of Demersal Stocks in the North Sea and Skagerrak. An independent team of three North American scientists were asked by the Partnership to assess the quality of the three stock assessments and report back to the Partnership.

At the meeting, ICES scientists described the process of assessing fish stocks and then reported their preliminary findings on the state of cod, plaice and saithe in the North Sea. The final research survey results for 2002 were still to come in. The scientists answered questions from the experts and members of the Partnership, and took part fully in discussions of the assessments.

The independent scientists concluded that the assessments were thorough and technically sound. The analyses provided the important information necessary for effective management of the stocks. The scientists made a series of recommendations relating to the presentation of the assessments, the use of alternative models, and the provision of additional data. Their comments are included in their own report (Annexe 1).

Fishing industry representatives also gave their opinions on the assessments and the process. They expressed general agreement with the assessment results for cod and saithe, but there were different views on the state of the plaice stock. Particular concern was expressed over the way reference points for the stocks were established without the involvement of the fishing industry. The advice which flows from the assessments depended upon these reference points.

The Consultation Meeting met its main objectives of making the assessments more open and transparent, and identifying additional data which might improve the assessments. The presence of the independent experts had reassured fishermen of the quality of the assessments and had enabled all aspects of them to be explored.

Fishermen opined that if the assessments were to become fully transparent then the format, presentation and language of the assessment report would need to be improved. They also emphasised the need for care in describing the state of fish stocks.

Fishermen were prepared to assist with the provision of additional and improved information. Both they and the scientists saw advantages in their being present at an early stage in the assessments to provide supporting information on the fisheries. Fishermen also pointed to the valuable information held in their log books, and urged that it be used.

Scientists too had benefited from the meeting and recognised the value of engaging with fishermen in the joint collection of data and in cooperative research. This initiative could be taken further through a Joint Partnership/ICES Study Group on Fishers' Knowledge.

Introduction

The Chair of the Partnership and the General Secretary of ICES welcomed participants to the Consultation Meeting. This event was a completely new one. The key objectives were to enhance openness of the stock assessment process and to establish a vehicle for useful discussions of the technical fish stock assessments, i.e. to

Improve transparency by making the assessments open to a wider public, especially to fishermen.

Consider additional data or information, which might improve the assessments.

For the first time, extracts from the report of the Working Group on the Assessment of Demersal Stocks in the North Sea and Skagerrak had been circulated to three international experts and the Partnership at an early stage. Comment on the assessments would be invited from the experts and from members of the Partnership.

The Assessments

The presentation began with a simple guide from ICES to the stock assessment process describing the data sources, the models used, and the methods of analysis. The importance of the Precautionary Approach was mentioned and data deficiencies were underscored:

- The lack of reliable data on discards
- Uncertainties about the misreporting of landings
- Problems in estimation natural mortality

With the data and assessment models used by ICES, it is especially difficult to determine the population numbers and fishing mortality in the final years, while there is generally more confidence in earlier years of the assessment because of the so-called "convergence" of the virtual population analysis.

At this point, participants discussed the Precautionary Approach, and how it is applied. There was recognition of the importance of this approach, but some scepticism about the way reference points were established without the involvement of the fishing industry. The Partnership aims to discuss this specific subject at a future meeting. It is a particularly important aspect of the advice which flows from the assessments.

Each of the three assessments - for cod, plaice and saithe - were considered in turn. First there was an opening presentation on the assessment from ICES. The international experts were allowed to

ask questions. There was then an open discussion of the assessment, involving all present. The Chair of the Partnership subsequently summarised the discussion. Finally, the international experts presented their findings on the assessments.

The comments below represent the summary prepared by the Chair of the Partnership. The full Report of the International Experts is appended as Annexe 1.

The Cod Assessment

The North Sea cod assessment can be summarised as follows:

- Cod spawning stock biomass (SSB) is the lowest observed
- Fishing mortality is high
- The year classes from 1997-2001 are at or below average size
- The stock is unlikely to recover at current rates of exploitation

In terms of the details of the assessment, the research vessel surveys are especially important for cod. A Working Group subgroup will meet early in October, before ACFM, to consider the results of the 2002 surveys. The current assessment is therefore still provisional. It emerged that commercial catch per unit effort (CPUE) data is no longer used. Changes in regulations, gear specifications and in the way the data have been collected means that such series are no longer internally consistent over time. They can only be used for tuning if a means is found to standardise the catch rates over the period. This exclusion of CPUE data has resulted in a downward revision of SSB and an increase in the estimated fishing mortality.

Time series analysis of the relationship between the surveys and stock size indicates that landings in 2001 could have been closer to 100,000 tonnes instead of the 50,000 tonnes reported. The Working Group's interpretation of this was that there may have been a misreporting of catches. At the very least, more fish were removed than could be accounted for. Fish had disappeared. This feature emerged from the sensitivity analysis, however, and it does not directly affect the assessment, which is based on the official landings.

Subsequent discussion clarified that the analysis described in the paragraph above assumed that nothing was known of the 2001 landings. Given that assumption, and the observed survey estimates, it was to be expected that the method would predict landings of the order of 100 000t given past landings. It was noted that the confidence interval of the 2001 landings estimated by time series analysis does include the reported value used by the Working Group.

Other explanations for the disappearing fish include a northward migration of older cod, and increased predation. Scientists reject the first of these, as there is no evidence of large numbers of cod joining, for example the Faroese fisheries. It was also believed that there was little evidence for increased predation on older cod, which could only come from very large fish or marine mammals.

The reliability of the catch data is the over-riding problem of the assessment, however, the assessment is robust, and points to a very sad picture for North Sea cod. Though care should be taken before describing it as being in a state of collapse, it is clear that a pivotal stage has been reached in the management of the fishery.

Fishermen's representatives agreed that cod is in a poor state and nobody is claiming that there is a lot of cod. Indeed, they agree that in the southern North Sea cod are very scarce. They do not accept, however, that this can be attributed entirely to fishing, and particularly deny substantial misreporting of catches. Fishermen point to the measures that have been taken to protect cod, especially the decommissioning of vessels and the introduction of technical measures, including increases in mesh size, which they think should have resulted in decreased fishing mortality in 2001. The assessment does show a decrease in fishing mortality from 2000 to 2001, but F remains very high.

The scientists pointed out that the effort reductions have not been large. To achieve the large reduction in fishing mortality they have called for would require a more substantial reduction in effort. Moreover, in the mixed fisheries of the North Sea the recent increase in mesh size can be expected to have a greater effect in conserving haddock and whiting, rather than cod. The fact remains that there are very few large cod and that there is a very high mortality of cod between the ages of 2 and 3. In addition, the abundance of the strong 1996 year class decreased very rapidly with time, suggesting that fishing mortality is indeed high. If there were to be another large year class it would decline rapidly at the current level of fishing mortality.

The meeting considered whether the assessments can be improved and a "wish list" was proposed:

> One big drawback is the problem of discarding and high grading. The collection of these data is sensitive, but given the need to limit fishing mortality it is necessary to know more about the catches, rather than the landings.
>
> Misreporting of landings also needs to be addressed.
>
> More reliable effort data are required. Satellite data (vessel monitoring systems) may help in looking at the spatial distribution of effort and changes in distribution of the cod stocks.
>
> In terms of the application of CPUE data, good data for individual vessels on a set by set basis is needed. The Netherlands is instituting a programme to collect these data.
>
> In terms of technical measure there are discrepancies between the expected benefits of these measures and how well they actually work at sea. The true effectiveness of technical measures needs to be evaluated.

The usefulness of the existing logbooks was discussed. Fishermen's representatives believe that more use could be made of the existing information. Scientists find that they are not quite in a form where they can be used at present, but potentially they could be very valuable. Unfortunately, the effort data are not well recorded, and the accuracy of the recorded catches is sometimes in doubt. The rules for access to the logbook also differ from country to country.

The meeting considered whether there was cause for optimism in relation to North Sea cod.

On the positive side, there is evidence of small cod being more abundant inshore, in both parts (north and south) of the North Sea and in Norwegian coastal waters. Fisheries in the northern North Sea are catching fish of all sizes. If fishing mortality were to be reduced substantially it should bring immediate improvements. Some steps have already been taken in this direction, with decommissioning and the introduction of technical measures but scientists do not believe that these go far enough. Much improved survival to maturity is required to be sure of bringing about improvements in recruitment.

Fishermen's representatives accept that it is the scientists' job to outline steps to get back within safe biological limits, but the size of the steps must also be consistent with the viability of the industry. Taking steps that are too large may lead to the failure of these measures unless they are accompanied by financial assistance.

The results of the 2002 surveys are to be considered in early October. This might shed some light on whether there have been improvements in recruitment.

Overall, the prospects for North Sea cod are poor, unless large reductions in fishing mortality can be achieved.

To decide whether the cod stock is threatened with collapse, more biological information on the distribution of cod and other biological parameters, like growth rate and age at maturity stable is needed. Evidence on the distribution is lacking. There is some evidence that cod are maturing earlier.

There was a plea from the meeting for great care to be taken before describing North Sea cod as being in a state of collapse. There needs to be a tighter definition of what is meant by the terms "collapse" and "exploited beyond safe biological limits".

The Plaice Assessment

The North Sea plaice assessment can be summarised as follows:

The SSB is below the Bpa reference point

Fishing mortality is above the Fpa reference point

No discard time series is available, but discards are high

Commercial CPUE data are available for the different fleets but are not used for tuning

The fishery depends largely on one-year class, the large 1996 cohort.

The landings of plaice have declined since the 1980's. At that time there were substantial landings of black fish, but these declined in the early 1990's. Plaice are caught in a mixed fishery for sole. Sole are smaller and more valuable and a mesh size of 80mm prevails in the fishery in the southern North Sea. This results in many plaice being caught, which are below the minimum landing size, and these are discarded. For this reason a plaice box was introduced.

CPUE for this fishery depends on fleet segmentation. The Netherlands is attempting to collect detailed CPUE for different vessels in relation to specific gears and mesh sizes. Currently the value of CPUE for determining stock size may be as problematical for plaice as it is for cod. Nevertheless, it is believed that it is possible to collect useful information from the fishery.

Fishing mortality was high in the late 1990's and has now reduced, but it is still above the Fpa for this stock

There was a downward trend in SSB until 1996. It has increased since then both because of the large 1996 year.class and because of the effects of restrictive TAC's. However, the SSB is still below the Bpa reference point

Additional analysis is still being carried out to look at the sensitivity of the assessment to the model assumptions, to look at sensitivity to discarding patterns, and to look at the consistency of the catch at age data.

Recruitment estimates will be available in October just prior to ACFM. The meeting discussed a number of issues including the effects of the plaice box, the effects of the Dutch ITQ management system, and the age composition of discards. In 2000 and 2001, the growth rate of the large 1996 year class was low, which made the fish susceptible to discarding for longer. Some 4 and 5 year old plaice are now being discarded. Whereas in the past about 50% by number were discarded, this may now have increased to 75%. An attempt is being made to look at discards in the past to provide a longer time series of data. There is little hard data on high-grading.

There was a long discussion of changes in fishing mortality. Very high values were shown in some figures in the report. How could F be as high as was shown when there had been a decrease in effort, the imposition of the plaice box, and restrictive TACs? There was a misunderstanding here, however. The F values discussed were not the appropriate ones. This led to a discussion of the

difficulty fishermen and lay people experience in understanding the language used and the figures presented in the report. It was pointed out that this report was prepared for an expert group – ACFM. However, the ACFM report itself would be read by fishermen & managers. It was important that it should be written in easy-to-read language. Debate also centered around the presentation of very precise figures to managers when those figures were uncertain. This was also something that needed to be addressed by ICES.

There was discussion of the changes in fishing mortality observed in the retrospective analyses. It was pointed out that it was not uncommon to find such discrepancies, as it is inherent in the process of retrospective analysis.

Similar to cod, a "wish list" was prepared for plaice. It was essentially the same as that for cod. It is especially important to have estimates of discards for plaice. In addition, there would be value in carrying out more widely – based surveys which would include adult fish as well as juveniles Additional, more detailed CPUE data were also required, though there were difficulties in using CPUE data to evaluate stock size because of the effects of ITQs.

With respect to discards in mixed fisheries, it is the intention of the Partnership to address this specific topic at a future meeting. This subject is also of great interest to the European Commission

There was a discussion of the sex (gender) of plaice and how this might effect the assessments. In the early 1980s, separate assessments were made for males and for females because of large differences in growth. The larger fish are predominately female, perhaps because of difference in behaviour, which make the males more susceptible to capture at spawning time. Assessments since at least the late 1980s have combined males and females in a single assessment. Plaice appear to be changing their maturation characteristics as a result of exploitation. More needs to be known about this.

The biomass limit reference point for plaice was discussed. It has been set at the lowest known biomass for plaice at the time. It is not known that this is a danger point for plaice, or that it represents a biological limit beyond which the stock will be threatened. New limit reference points are due to be considered by ICES in 2003. There was a strong feeling within the meeting that this issue was important, and that the fishing industry should be involved in the discussions.

Dutch fishermen believed that catches had recently increased year on year and suggested that the surveys gave a good picture of the plaice stock, which is better than that conveyed by the assessment. This led to a discussion of the importance of considering the information held by fishermen – a subject the Partnership will be addressing later this week.

Previous advice on plaice gives the impression that uncertainties are small. For example, one year, ICES advised changing the TAC from 78 000t to 77 000t, giving the impression that it was statistically possible to differentiate the two numbers. Scientists would like to provide advice incorporating the uncertainties, but managers and politicians prefer to have advice without the uncertainties.

The saithe assessment

The saithe assessment covers a wider geographical area than those for cod and plaice. As well as the North Sea it includes the Scottish west coast (area VIa) and the Skagerrak and Kattegat (IIIa).

There are no recruitment indices available for saithe, mostly because ages 1 and 2 remain very close to shore and inside harbours. The assessment also differs in that it has tended in the past to slightly over-estimate fishing mortality, while for cod and plaice previous assessments have had a tendency to underestimate fishing mortality. The saithe stock also appears to be increasing. SSB is well above Bpa, and fishing mortality is below Fpa. The calibration of the assessments is driven by 4 commercial CPUE series, and only 1 survey is performed (and that is an acoustic survey). The recent over-estimation of fishing mortality seems now to have disappeared.

Directed saithe fisheries predominantly involve vessels from Norway, France and Germany. Recruitment occurs around age 3, and the fishery mainly targets 3 and 4 year old fish before they reach maturity.

In 2001, the Norwegian quota was taken over 6 months, indicating that abundance is high. The French fleet tries to spread the quota over the full year. No discard data are collected for saithe from the directed saithe fisheries.

Over the last 10 years landings have been around 100,000 tonnes. There do not appear to have been any especially strong year classes in recent years. The assessment shows that fishing mortality is

below Fpa. The SSB peaked in the 1970's declined in the 80's and early 90's and has now risen again, and is currently considered to be above Bpa.

The single survey is not considered adequate to calibrate VPA on its own, and the 4 commercial CPUE series are also used. Since these are fisheries targeting upon schools of fish there are dangers in relying upon CPUE especially since the effects of TAC management are unknown. CPUE from fisheries exploiting schooling species may reflect fish density on the grounds rather than overall stock abundance.

The general conclusion is that the stocks are in a healthy state, and this is confirmed by the perceptions of fishermen.

The meeting engaged in a wide discussion of the saithe fisheries. The vessels tended to track very large schools each of one size range. The schools are highly migratory though the exact pattern is not known. Fish may travel from northern Norway to enter the North Sea. It is not known whether there is a series of separate stocks. The pattern of fishing, where vessels remain with school may undermine the use of CPUE data for tuning. However, the Norwegian acoustics survey does not cover the total stock and it provides only an index of abundance, not an absolute estimate of biomass.

Saithe are caught in the English and Scottish mixed fisheries, and since the UK shares of the quota are small many of the saithe caught are discarded. The discard levels are known for the Scottish fleet, but cannot be applied to the other, directed fisheries. In the latter discard levels are said to be low, but direct data are not available.

Fishermen have previously regarded the saithe assessments with some scepticism. However, they believe that the current assessment indicating relatively stable biomass over the last 4-5 years correspond with their view of stock abundance.

The scientist's problem with the saithe is that there is no direct index of recruitment. Also, the fishery mainly takes fish before they have matured, which requires caution in management.

Similar to cod and plaice, a "wish list" was prepared:

There is a need for better understanding of the nature of the CPUE series. The targeting of schools might complicate matters, as CPUE might not be an appropriate measure of abundance. More information is required on the way the fisheries operate, and on the spatial distribution of the fleet and the fish.

More information on recruitment is required. A survey in coastal waters directed at the young fish, is needed, otherwise the prediction will always lag by 2 years.

More information is also required on discarding. The Scottish discard data are not applicable to the directed fleets for which there are no direct discard data. This point gave rise to general discussion on the need to put pressure on those fleets and administrations which did not allow discard data to be collected or used.

The fact that saithe are exploited before they reach maturity has implications for the setting of the reference points.

Chairman's Conclusions

There was agreement amongst all parties that the Consultation Meeting had met its objectives. The early release of extracts from the Working Group report, and the free discussion of the assessments in open forum had achieved the objective of making the assessments more transparent. Fishermen's representatives were particularly appreciative of the willingness of ICES scientists to lay out the assessments, complete with flaws, and then to respond to comments from both the international experts and others. The meeting had also identified clear needs for the collection of new data on the fisheries, much of which could only be collected systematically with the full cooperation of fishermen. It had therefore achieved its second objective of identifying additional data or information which might improve the assessments.

The presence of the three international stock assessment specialists had contributed much to the success of the meeting. Fishermen's representatives commented that the additional scrutiny provided by the experts had reassured them of the quality of the assessments, and had enabled them to explore aspects of the science which they would not have been able to deal with fully by themselves.

The international experts confirmed that the assessments conformed to high scientific standards, and were appropriate for their intended use. However, they also identified supporting analytical models and new methods of analysis which would facilitate the preparation of better assessments in the future. They put forward proposals for additional technical and scientific data, which might improve the assessments. They suggested that if they had been provided with direct access to the data used in the assessment at an early stage, it would have enabled them to carry out alternative analyses and a more in-depth review. They have produced their own written report, addressing the various issues raised, and this is appended as Annexe 1.

One clear benefit of the meeting had been to improve fishermen's knowledge and experience of the process of stock assessment. Fishermen had commented that the format of the assessments, the language used, and the complex figures presented, made them especially difficult to understand. They appreciated that the report was being written for other experts (on ACFM) but stressed that if the assessments were to become more transparent in the future then the communication problem would need to be addressed. Fishermen also emphasised the need for scientists to be careful in their use of language. Terms like "stock collapse" should be used only with great care, and only after careful definition of what was meant.

The meeting had introduced fishermen to the problems of data shortage, which created difficulties for the scientists. It had become evident during the meeting that scientists were using some of the data collected, but were discarding or ignoring other information, for example data collected on CPUE. Fishermen's representatives would like to see full use made of all the information collected and were willing to do what they could to improve its quality and availability. They made suggestions for collected additional data in a systematic way. In particular, they stressed the valuable information already available in fishermen's log books, and suggested that steps should be taken to fully utilise it.

As a complement to that, scientists were able to stress to fishermen their need for better data, for example on catches rather than landings, and their more general need for information about the fisheries. Indeed, the meeting had confirmed that there were advantages in having fishermen present during the early stages of a stock assessment, to provide information on the way the fleets operated and to provide information on the distribution and behaviour of fish.

It had become evident that the scientists, as well as the fishermen, had benefited from the meeting. The feedback on the assessments provided by fishermen had proved valuable. Scientists had

learned to be more careful in their use of language, and had become sensitive to the need for using alternative ways of presenting information. They accepted that they needed better, geographically referenced models, and that there was a whole new task before them of collected information from fishermen and integrating that with the existing data sources. There was scope in the future for creating cooperative research programmes with fishermen. Some of these needs can be met by taking forward the proposal of the Partnership for a Joint Study Group with ICES on Fishers' Knowledge.