



### ICES Issues 2021 Advice for Certain Demersal and Pelagic Stocks

**ICES advice for certain Bay of Biscay, Celtic Seas and North Sea fish stocks was released on June 30. This year's assessments, advice drafting and review all took place through video-conferencing meetings.**

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, ICES took the decision to abbreviate this year's advice. The assessment approaches and checks were maintained, while advice sheets were reduced to headline advice, figures and tables. Most of the text has been removed and the previously issued advice appended. Full advice has been issued for assessments that have been through a benchmark since last given, and if advice has changed by more than 20 per cent explanatory text is included, and also if there was a change in the application of an assessment or the advice warranted further explanation.

#### Herring

Three stocks of herring occur in Irish waters, 6a, 7b-c to the northwest, Celtic Sea Herring (7aS, 7g-h and 7j-k) to the south and Irish Sea herring (7aN) to the east.

The northwest herring advice is for 0-catch as per last year. This is a combination of two stocks. Since 2019 the assessment is considered indicative of trend, with the stock estimated to be at one of its lowest levels, likely to remain low in 2021, and below possible reference points. A genetics project to develop tools that could be used to split the stocks (see Editorial, page four) is on-going and will report by the end of 2020. ICES also issued catch scenarios advice on July 2, based on a request from the Commission for stocks where the advice is for a

zero TAC for 2020. There are two options given for a Monitoring TAC in 2021 for herring 6a, 7bc, of 4,840 tonnes or 3,100 tonnes respectively.

Celtic Sea Herring advice is also for 0-catch as per last year. The spawning stock biomass (SSB) has been estimated to be significantly below Blim (the limit reference point for SSB) and no fishing scenario enabling the stock to rebuild above Blim in the short term was identified. Some retrospective issues have been identified this year, probably due to the low level of the stock. A monitoring TAC of 869 tonnes for 2021 (the same as this year) is included in the catch options table.

For Irish Sea herring, the advice is for 7,341 tonnes (-9 per cent compared to the TAC for 2020).

#### Demersal stocks

Broadly speaking, advice for 13 demersal stocks is similar to the 2019 advice, while it has decreased for seven stocks and increased for four stocks. The assessments for Celtic Sea cod, haddock and whiting are currently being reviewed, and their advice will be released together with the *Nephrops*, West of Scotland anglerfish and Rockall megrim advice in the autumn (October 30).

Advice for West of Scotland, North Sea haddock (3a, 4, 6a) has increased substantially (66 per cent) owing to a recent strong year class that has increased the stock size. Rockall haddock (6b) has

decreased substantially (40 per cent) owing to a decline in the stock size and a review of the fishing selectivity for older aged fish.

In the Irish Sea, plaice (7a) has decreased by 50 per cent following a change in the basis of the advice to the Maximum Sustainable Yield basis this year. Sole (7a) advice has increased by 37 per cent owing to a further increase in stock size on last year.

West of Ireland, plaice (7bc) reduced by 21 per cent as a precautionary buffer was applied, and sole (7bc) also reduced (21 per cent) with the application of a precautionary buffer.

In the Celtic Sea, plaice (7fg), reduced by 17 per cent as the biomass in the most recent two of five years has reduced, and sole (7fg) reduced by 16 per cent following a reduction in biomass.

It is important to remember this ICES Advice is not necessarily the same as the final Commission's proposals for 2021 which will not be issued until October. A recent policy statement from the European Commission (June 16, 8871/20 Peche 153) included an overview of progress made in achieving sustainable fishing by EU fleets. The progress in achieving Fmsy in the northeast Atlantic is viewed as very positive with 62 out of 78 TACs now in line with Fmsy. This should translate into 99 per cent of landings from EU managed fisheries in the Atlantic, North Sea and Baltic coming from sustainably managed fisheries.

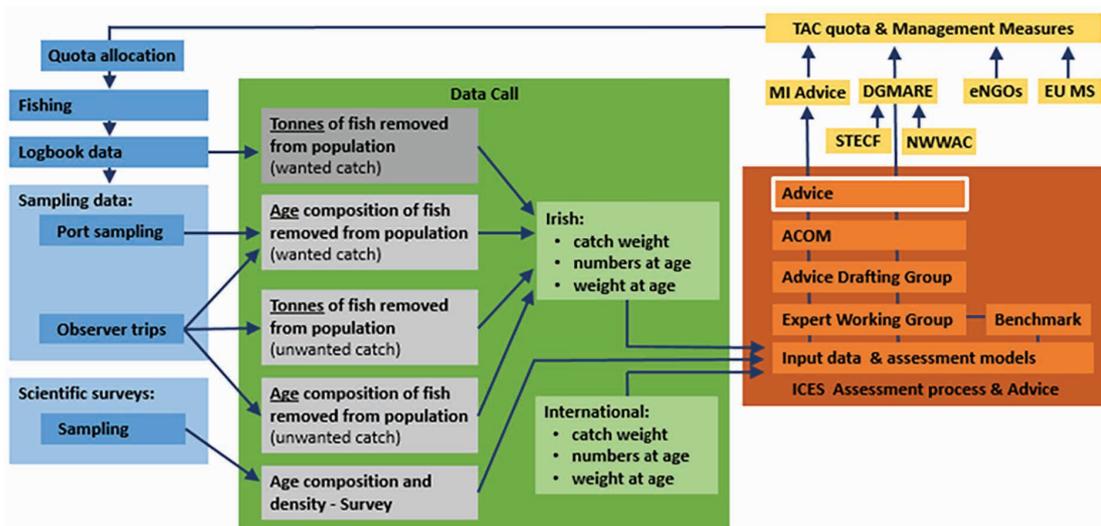


Figure (1) Fishing, Stock Assessment Advice Cycle

Negotiations on the withdrawal of the United Kingdom (UK) from the European Union (EU) continue but are currently on a knife-edge on whether or not a trade deal can be agreed by the end of the year. Recent talks in June were cut short with comments from Michel Barnier summing up “serious divergences remain” and the EU needed its positions “to be better understood and respected” by the UK. The deadline of June 30 to seek an extension to the transition period beyond the end of the year has passed without an extension, meaning the end of the year is the deadline to reach a trade deal. Negotiations have resumed again last week, but to date little progress has been made, and will continue during July and August. The UK remains adamant that it will not consider linking a fisheries agreement to a trade agreement despite this proviso being agreed under the Political Declaration and signed off by Prime Minister Boris Johnson at the same time as the Withdrawal Agreement. The three major issues which both sides are diametrically opposed are: level playing field, fisheries and governance.

Since the beginning of the current round of BREXIT negotiations Ireland, fellow EU countries and the UK have had the COVID-19 pandemic crisis to deal with. Government resources in many countries have been diverted to this very serious threat which has brought normal life, in all aspects, to a halt. In addition, Ireland has had to deal with its pandemic challenge following a general election which did not automatically result in the formation of a new government. However, in the matter of negotiating a trade agreement between the UK and the EU, Irish politicians and the Programme for Government remained fully supportive of our key demand regarding the link between fisheries and an overall trade deal.

There is now a distinct possibility these negotiations will result in a “No-Deal BREXIT” which could have catastrophic consequences for Irish trade and, in particular, the Irish fishing industry. The one industry which is completely and uniquely exposed to anything other than an orderly transition, is the Irish fisheries sector. Last year, our seafood industry was valued at €1.22 billion employing more than 14,600 people with this economic footprint predominantly in rural, coastal locations. A no-deal BREXIT would be the death knell for many coastal fishing communities, with projected job losses of between 30-40 per cent in the Irish industry. Currently, almost a third of Irish catch is caught in UK waters, mostly notably 60 per cent of mackerel and 40 per cent of *Nephrops* (prawns). There is also likely to be conflict at sea over access to historical fishing areas which could have very serious consequences.

**Initial public and state responses to the rapid onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic as it swept through European countries was one of treating and mitigating the illness caused by the coronavirus. In Ireland there was a speedy and effective lockdown supported by adequate financial support to enable people to self-isolate and, where possible, work from home. Only in recent weeks has there been any lessening of these measures and, so far, the approach has been very successful with relatively few deaths or positive cases.**

Unfortunately, there is a long-term price to be paid with severe commercial consequences. The fishing industry has been very severely impacted with global supply chains collapsing and prices in free-fall. The routes to market for fish and fishery products are, broadly, service supply and retail; traditionally, the more expensive fish and shellfish goes to restaurants, hotels and other catering, while retail provides an outlet for the less expensive products.

As the pandemic spread from China to other Asian countries, Europe and the Americas, all countries went into lockdown to a greater or lesser extent. Ireland's exports of shellfish to China, Korea, Singapore and Hong Kong were immediately shutdown as they were dependent on air freight, while fresh fish to closer European countries continued, but eventually slowed to an uneconomic level with demand and prices so erratic it became impossible to maintain any level of business.

In late January 2020, the EU activated its Integrated Political Crisis Response (IPCR) mechanism to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak and further escalated this mechanism on March 2 to facilitate the adoption of relevant EU legislation and ongoing coordination with Member States to share information, assess needs and ensure a coherent EU-wide response. On March 13 member states were informed that the EMFF (2014-2020) with a budget of €5.7 billion in shared management with other Member States could re-direct unspent funds to existing and new EMFF measures until the end of 2023 to reduce the negative impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the workers and businesses in these sectors. As a part of its Recovery Package,

the EU announced in June it would add €500 million to the planned EMFAF (2021 – 2027).

The Irish fish Producer Organisations (POs), IFPO, ISEFPO, ISWFPO and KFO, sought an urgent meeting with Minister Creed on April 23 to discuss a detailed suite of specific measures to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on the Irish seafood sector. They acknowledged and thanked the Minister for those measures which had already been implemented but pointed out that a viable seafood industry needed more than keeping harbours open and the COVID-19 benefit payments. The Minister had already called for a continuation of fishing activities to ensure a secure supply of seafood to Irish and European markets during the unprecedented crisis but this required urgent financial assistance.

The POs outlined the issues which needed to be overcome and the measures which the EU had implemented by way of significant amendments to the EMFF regulation. They asked the Minister to meet them to discuss the wider range of options which would be available following the EMFF amendments as previously only storage aid had been discussed and they felt this was totally inadequate given the seriousness of the situation. Despite their efforts, the only solution brought forward by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine was a Tie-up Scheme, which industry at large did not take up to any significant extent. It was deemed to be under-funded and did not achieve any substantial mitigation of the sector's problems.

# Environmental Issues Increasingly Relevant for the Fishing Industry

As environmental issues continue to increase in relevance, they will become as important to the fishing industry as the Landing Obligation or the annual TAC and Quota figures. Climate change will dominate much of political planning and policy in coming decades and will impact significantly on industries such as fishing which depend on environmental stability over the long-term.

The European Union (EU) is acutely aware of the challenges climate change will pose for its citizens and is attempting to mitigate, and where possible reverse, the most negative consequences of the current trends already evident such as increased pollution and rising global temperatures. The overall EU plan, referred to as "The Green Deal" (KFO Newsletter No 77, April 2020) is based on a major overhaul of every aspect of the European economy from energy generation to food consumption, from transport to manufacturing and construction. This will incorporate existing efforts over recent years and bring all relevant legislation into line with the aims of The Green Deal.

Food production will be at the heart of The Green Deal policy with a prominent strategy **Farm to Fork** which addresses the challenges of sustainable food systems and recognises the inextricable links between healthy people, healthy societies and a healthy planet. The strategy is also central to the Commission's agenda to achieve the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which is also on Ireland's agenda.

The Farm to Fork strategy identifies the need for some drastic changes in agricultural practices as this sector is currently responsible for 10 per cent of EU Green House Gas emissions but states: "In parallel to changes in agriculture, the shift to sustainable fish and seafood production must also be accelerated. Economic data show that, where fishing has become sustainable, income has grown in parallel. The Commission will step up efforts to bring fish stocks to sustainable levels via CFP where implementation gaps remain, strengthen fisheries management where required in cooperation with all coastal states and re-assess, by 2022, how the CFP addresses the risks triggered by climate change. The proposed revision of the EU's fisheries control system will contribute to the fight against fraud through an enhanced traceability system. The mandatory

use of digitalised catch certificates will strengthen measures to prevent illegal fish products from entering the EU market." Importantly for the fishing industry, often regarded as contributors to carbon-based pollution, Farm to Fork confirms seafood generates a lower carbon footprint than animal production on land.

The future of fishing appears to be safe in the context of the Farm to Fork strategy but there will be substantial changes required at many levels of the industry throughout the supply chain. Farm to Fork is only one portion of The Green Deal and the fishing industry must explore all aspects of this policy and ensure all benefits are maximised and threats minimised in coming years.

## Offshore Renewable Energy (ORE) – threat or opportunity?

Renewable energy has been around for a long time in Ireland - the first commercial wind farm in Bellacorrick, Co Mayo, started operation in 1992 and this heralded the era of wind power. By 2015, 23 per cent of electricity used in the State came from renewable sources – with more than 20 per cent coming from wind. However, the approach to energy, where it comes from and how it is used, has entered a new era. The Green Deal has very specific policies and targets regarding energy; the EU Energy System Integration Strategy has a very long list of targets and objectives to be met by 2050 which will be pursued on a variety of fronts and sources of renewable energy will play a very important role.

In Ireland there has been extensive research and fact-finding. The attached map illustrates suitable sites identified around the coast with potential for wind and wave energy generation. The logistical problems which previously limited development of this sector are being solved rapidly which, in turn, increases the sea areas now suitable for ORE generation. In addition, the rapid proliferation of traditional land-based

windmill power generation is becoming less popular with the public on the grounds of noise, scenic and habitat degradation while, as yet, there is less awareness of the implications of OREs negative impact. The current development of the National Marine Planning Framework, while very necessary and long over-due, will facilitate the fast-tracking of planning permission for ORE installations in the near future.

Currently the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (DCCAE) is inviting submissions regarding the Grid Development for Offshore Wind in Ireland. This consultation may seem remote from the actual installations off the Irish coast, but decisions made now as to how the entire process of ORE operates in Ireland and whether the important decision making rests entirely in the hands of commercial interests or is retained in State hands is quite important.

The fishing industry has a huge stake in what happens in our offshore waters. With continued uncertainty over BREXIT, other environmental targets regarding fuel consumption, greenhouse gas emissions and the unknown consequences of COVID-19, it is vital to ensure the most important resource – the waters you fish in – are in safe hands. The deadline for the public consultation on Grid Development Policy for Offshore Wind in Ireland has been extended to July 22, 2020. <https://www.dccae.gov.ie/en-ie/energy/consultations/Pages/Consultation-to-Inform-a-Grid-Development-Policy-for-Offshore-Wind-in-Ireland.aspx>

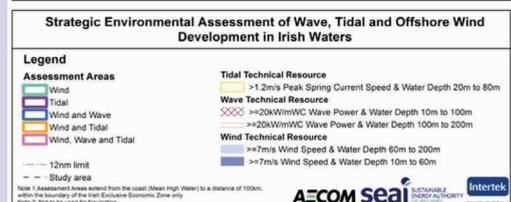
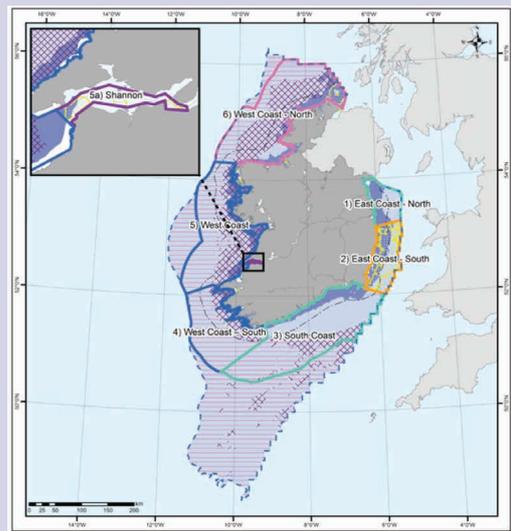


Figure (3) The Sea Areas with Potential for Offshore Energy Generation (Source: Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan, DCENR)



Figure (2) The European Green Deal Roadmap

# Editorial



by Sean O'Donoghue

CHIEF EXECUTIVE, KFO



This July Editorial begins with reference to the KFO AGM which, in normal times, would have been held by now. This year we have had to postpone our AGM until September 7 which will be conducted by virtual means and in a much shorter format. Once more, our lives and businesses have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic which has created havoc worldwide.

The ICES Advice for demersal and some pelagic species was issued on June 30 this year. Due to COVID-19 restrictions the drafting of the advice was done largely by video-conferencing and to facilitate this, was abbreviated as much as possible. Full advice was only given in the case of species which had undergone benchmarking or if the advice had changed by more than 20 per cent and explanatory text was required.

The advice for northwest herring (6a, 7b,c) remains at zero catch. This is a mixed stock for which there is a Monitoring TAC and the results of the scientific assessments from samples submitted in 2019 and early 2020 will be discussed at our meeting later this month

(July 22). The value of data collection fisheries in the early months of 2020 will also be considered. The major genetics project will be finalised before the end of the year, and the results are looking very promising in terms of splitting the combined assessment into two stocks. The next step in the process is to try to get ICES to carry out the benchmark as soon as possible.

Celtic Sea herring is unchanged from last year with a zero catch advice and a nine per cent reduction is advised for Irish Sea herring. The advice for 13 demersal stocks is more or less in line with 2019 advice. Celtic Sea cod, haddock and whiting are currently being reviewed and their advice will be released along with those species normally released on October 30. These ICES Advice projections may not be followed by the EU Commission's proposals to follow in October. A recent policy statement from the Commission was very positive regarding the progress being made by EU-managed fleets in the Atlantic, North Sea and Baltic towards achieving

Fmsy and predicted 99 per cent of landings will be for sustainably managed fisheries this year.

The BREXIT negotiations have now passed the point of extending the transition period and will drag on over the remaining months with the possibility of a "No-Deal BREXIT" becoming more and more likely. The crucial points of having a level playing field regarding standards and regulations, fisheries and governance continue to keep both parties apart and, in particular, the UK remains obdurate that there will not be a link between a fisheries agreement and a trade agreement. A failure to reach an agreement would have disastrous consequences for Ireland which relies heavily on its trade relationship with the UK and would be completely devastating for our fishing industry. We are very dependent on access to UK waters for our most valuable species such as mackerel and prawns and there is a very real danger of serious conflict at sea if we are prevented from entering traditional fishing grounds. We are heartened by the continued support of the government and all our politicians in their support of our demand for a link between fisheries and the overall trade deal.

Underlying all our problems with BREXIT we have the on-going problems created by COVID-19. This pandemic has completely undermined our society, structures and the way we go about our daily lives. The Irish producer organisations are of one voice regarding keeping our core fishing industry alive and, if not prosperous, surviving until we turn the corner with COVID-19. This industry is of huge importance in many coastal communities where opportunities are limited and "working from home" is not an option.

We were disappointed when our combined proposals submitted to Minister Creed resulted only in the Tie-Up Scheme which, by now, has been shown to be a non-starter. We now have a new government and a new Minister in Barry Cowen and hope he will re-examine our proposals which would help a beleaguered industry survive until this health emergency has ended.

We hope the new government will give the Irish fishing industry the consideration and recognition it deserves as a major exporter of Irish produce and a very significant economic driver in our coastal communities. There are a number of problems besetting the industry which have been included in the Programme for Government. We now look forward to supporting the new Minister and his team in addressing and implementing these and other areas in the coming months.

## Important Dates July - September 2020

DATE	MEETINGS	VENUE
Jul 1	MAC WG3	Virtual
Jul 2	Industry Fisheries Science Research Paternship (IFSRP)	Virtual
Jul 2	PeIAC Western Horse mackerel Focus Group	Virtual
Jul 3	Executive Committee MAC	Virtual
Jul 6-8	NWWAC, General Assembly, ExCom, WGs	Virtual
Jul 9-10	PELAC WG 1&2, ExCom	Virtual
Jul 13-15	MAC Workshop: Voluntary Sustainability Claims on Seafood Products	Virtual
Jul 14	MAC WG 3	Virtual
Jul 20	Fisheries Council	Virtual
Jul 21	Quota Management Meeting	Virtual
Jul 22	North West Herring Industry Meeting	Virtual
Aug 17-21	6th Round EU/UK BREXIT Negotiations over July and August	Brussels/London
Aug 26-Sep 1	ICES Working Group on Widely Distributed Stocks WGWIDE	Virtual
Sep 1	MAC WG1	Virtual
Sep 2-4	NWWAC, General Assembly, ExCom, WGs	Virtual
Sep 7	KFO AGM	Virtual
Sep 8	MAC WG2	Virtual
Sep 14-17	ICES Advice Drafting Group on Widely Distributed Stocks (pelagic) ADGWIDE	Virtual
Sep 21-22	Agriculture & Fisheries Council	Virtual
Sep 22-23	MAC, ExCom & WGs	Virtual /Göteborg
Sep 23-24	EAPO AGM	Virtual
TBC	Marine Spatial Planning Advisory Group	Virtual
Sep 30	Release ICES Advice on widely distributed stocks (pelagic)	Copenhagen

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