



ICES Issues Advice for Demersal and Certain Pelagic Stocks for 2016

ICES advice for various stocks was released on June 30. Advice has been published for the main demersal species, herring and sprat. Advice will come out in October for the remaining pelagic species; anglerfish in VI; prawns (*Nephrops*); megrim in Rockall, and megrim in VII and VIII.

0-catch advice

ICES continues to give 0-catch advice or its equivalent for several stocks. These are cod and whiting in VIa; cod, whiting and sole in VIIa, and herring in VI and VIIbc.

Advice for Herring Stocks in VI and VIIbc

For herring in VIaN the advice is down 100 per cent from 22,690t to 0t, and VIa south, VIIbc the 0-catch advice is maintained, though this advice is given jointly now as VI and VIIbc. For these two herring stocks, ICES also recommends that a rebuilding plan be developed.

In 2015 a benchmark was conducted for both stocks in this area. Despite all the effort towards splitting the two stocks, it was not possible to produce separate assessments for each stock. Therefore, ICES was left with no option but to give advice for the two stocks in combination. This advice, based on the MSY approach, is for 0t TAC in 2016, for both areas. This advice means that no catch other than zero is consistent with obtaining MSY conditions.

The VIaS/VIIbc stock is already subject to 0-catch advice in 2015. This is because that stock was assessed to be below limit biomass reference points. But how is it that the TAC for VIaN herring goes from 22,690 t in 2015 to 0t in 2016? It should be noted that the VIaN stock was not assessed to be in a very healthy condition last year. In 2014 it was found to be slightly overfished, and to be just above the management plan biomass. The VIaN assessment was receiving a "bonus" from the

neighbouring VIaS stock. This is because VIaS fish were present in the VIaN area when the survey for that stock was conducted. Such an effect would inflate the VIaN stock. The effect would be even greater if the VIaN fishery also takes VIaS fish. In combining the stocks, for assessment, it seems that the bonus effect disappears and the combined stocks are assessed to be just below the new limit reference point in 2015. In forecasting forward for 2016, extremely poor recruitment leads to the stocks decreasing further. This leads to the inevitable ICES advice for 0t TAC in 2016, which is very difficult to understand.

The KFO has put lots of effort into achieving separate assessments for these stocks. Hopefully the genetic work being supported by the KFO will lead to scientists being able to segregate the stocks and produce separate assessments.

Advice for TAC Increase

ICES is advising a TAC increase for a number of stocks. For haddock in IV and VIa the advice is for landings of 61,930t (catch, 74,854t,) which is a 30 per cent increase. Haddock in VIb (Rockall) has advised landings of 3,225t, a catch of 3,932t, a 25 per cent increase. For megrim in IV and VIa advised landings are 7,539t and catches of 8,567t are a 21 per cent increase. The northern hake stock landings advice is 96,651t, with landings of 109,951t, a six per cent increase. The advice, based on the long-term management plan, and not MSY, for Celtic Sea herring is up 30 per cent to 20,348t in 2016.

Advice for TAC Decrease

Herring in the Irish Sea is subject to a slight decrease of six per cent on last year's TAC. Also in the Irish Sea, haddock is down 59 per cent to 481t and 1,072t (landings and catch respectively.) Irish Sea plaice is down 69 per cent to landings of 343t and 1,244t (landings and catch respectively). Cod at Rockall is down 77 per cent to 17t, with saithe in IV and VI down six per cent to 68,601t landings or 75,049t catch.

The advice for some Celtic Sea demersals is down on last year's TACs. Cod is down 30 per cent (landings: 3,569t) and haddock 27 per cent (landings: 6,078t). Plaice in VIIg is down nine per cent to landings of 420t (catches of 1,500t). Plaice in VIIbc is also down to landings of 30t. Sole in the Celtic Sea is down slightly (landings of 745t) as is also the case in VIIbc (30t landings advised for 2016), and in VIIhjk (205t). For haddock and plaice in VIIa, decreases of 59 and 69 per cent imply 481t and 343t landings respectively;

In the case of sea bass in the Celtic Sea, there is no TAC, but the advice is a big drop on previous advices to 541t landings.

Advice for Same TAC

Plaice in VIIh-k is the same as last year's advice at 135t. Whiting in the Celtic Sea advice is largely the same as last year at 15,395t. Overall, this is an increase, but when the component of the TAC area in the English Channel is accounted for it will result in probably status quo TAC, due to lower advice for the North Sea whiting. Sprat in VI and VII, though there is no TAC, continues to have advice for 3,500t. For pollack the advice (4,200t of landings) is as last year, but recent landings are much lower than the TAC. Though there is no TAC, the advice for sea bass in the SW of Ireland for 5t, is the same as the previous advice.

Industry and Science Collaborate on Pre-Mackerel Egg Surveys

In the winter of 2014/15 a unique series of four surveys was carried out by the pelagic fisheries associations and the marine research institutes from four countries -- Ireland, Scotland, Denmark and the Netherlands -- to answer key questions about spawning timing in mackerel.

Why was the project undertaken?

The aim of the project was to determine the start time for mackerel spawning in the western spawning component area in 2015, in preparation for the full mackerel egg survey in 2016. Recent full surveys in 2010 and 2013 have clearly shown that spawning is starting earlier and that the spawning peak occurs earlier than has been observed previously. The net result being that potentially, an unknown part of the spawning early in the season was missed in 2010 and 2013. The International Council for the Exploration of the Seas (ICES) surveys are designed to cover the whole spawning area and period. Therefore, the possibly missed spawning could make the analysis method and hence management of this stock less accurate. If there was spawning in the western area prior to the normal start of the survey in March, this could produce a relatively lower estimate than previous surveys which successfully covered the whole spawning season. The survey design in 2014/15 was intended to look at mackerel egg production before, and at, the start of the spawning season, to provide more information on spawning timing to help in the design of the ICES Triennial Mackerel Egg Survey for 2016. The 2015 surveys are therefore an important contributor to the design and conduct of the 2016 stock assessment survey carried out under the Data Collection Framework. The 2015 surveys were funded under the two per cent quota available for new scientific work linked to fisheries. This funding has been agreed by the national authorities in the Netherlands, Denmark, Ireland and Scotland, with each country carrying out one of four surveys covering the period from December 2014 to March 2015.

How were the surveys conducted?

A total of four ten-day surveys were carried out: the Netherlands in December 2014; Denmark in January 2015; Ireland in February 2015, and Scotland in March 2015. Each survey was carried out on a commercial boat organised by the national pelagic industry, and

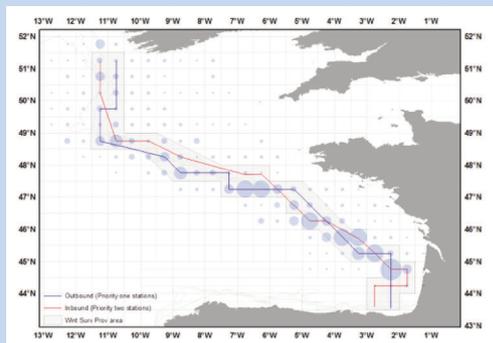


Figure 1: Egg survey design for winter surveys

usually with scientists from several of the institutes including the Marine Institute in Ireland, Marine Scotland Science, IMARES in the Netherlands, and the Danish Technical University.

The aim of these surveys was to find the start date and location of the southern boundary of mackerel spawning in the western area. Each survey was planned to track south easterly along the 200m contour south from SW of Ireland collecting egg samples every 0.5 degree. This was planned to continue until the inner corner of the Bay of Biscay, when the vessel would

return and continue to collect egg samples. Figure 1 shows the planned track, and the locations of eggs in 2013.

At each sampling station a high speed plankton sampler (GULF VII type) towed in a v-shaped profile through the water column down to a maximum of 200m, was used. Samples were preserved in formaldehyde and analysed on return to the laboratory. The survey plan also included the collection of adult fish to examine fecundity and maturity state, but these proved difficult to collect.

All four surveys experienced some problems while being carried out.

The first (NL) survey on the *Neda* in December 2014, was intended to test the assumption that no spawning had occurred at this time. 24 samples were taken between 43 and 48°N, and in the planned locations along the shelf edge. No mackerel eggs were found.

The second (Danish) survey was carried out on the *Ceton* in January 2015, but was badly hit by the January storms and could not carry out the sampling programme.

The third (Irish) survey was carried out on the *Atlantic Challenge* in February. Spawning was expected to have started at this time. A total of 45 plankton tows were carried out and 356 mackerel eggs were identified along the shelf edge throughout the survey area (see Figure 2.)

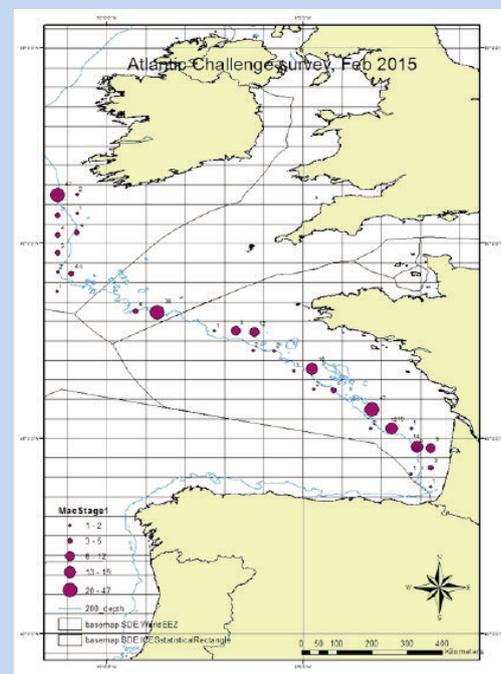


Figure 2: Atlantic Challenge Survey, February 2015

The fourth (Scottish) survey was carried out on the *Altaire*, from March 2. A total of 45 plankton stations were carried out and 4,536 mackerel eggs were identified. The vessel was not allowed into French waters, but the eggs were again found right along the shelf edge (see Figure 3.)

What We Learned

The surveys were designed to see if there was spawning earlier than we had thought previously, and if so where. It was clear that there was no mackerel spawning in December, which we had presumed, but confirmation was valuable. Because no sampling was possible in

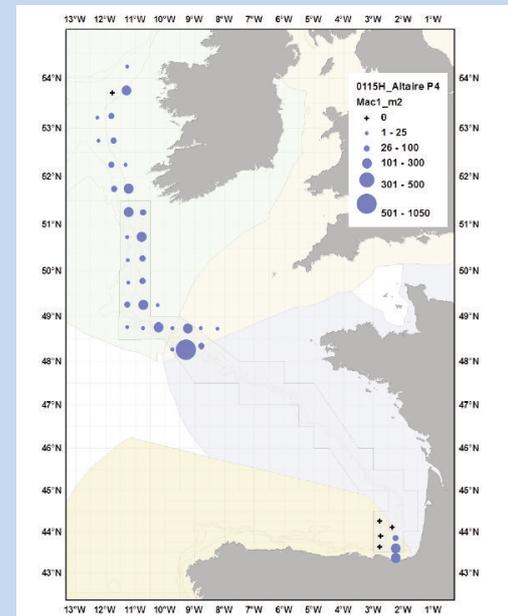


Figure 3: Altaire Survey, March 2015

January we don't know what might have been happening then, and so the major conclusions need to be drawn from the final two surveys. We had previously assumed that spawning started around February 10 (Day 42). This was based on surveys carried out some years ago. Our February survey started on the 15th, just 5 days after the assumed start. Eggs were found across the surveyed region, although at low densities. The first reasonable numbers of eggs were taken on February 17. Taking these findings together, this would suggest that our nominal start date, only seven days earlier, is probably too late in the current context.

The second important finding comes from comparison of the egg densities in the third and fourth surveys. We cannot directly compare the two surveys as they did not cover the same areas, but, it is important that the average egg densities in the March survey were almost ten times greater than the February survey, suggesting that spawning may have started not long before our February survey. The conclusion from the last two surveys in particular is that spawning was probably still occurring earlier in 2015 than in survey years prior to 2010, but may have been slightly later than that seen in 2013.

Based on this project, the ICES survey-planning group has planned the 2016 egg survey to start in February. In particular, the first Irish survey is planned to start on February 4, and the first Scottish survey, on a commercial vessel, will also be done in February.

Beyond the science, we learned a great deal on how to go about planning and carrying out multi-national surveys on commercial vessels. All the surveys took place largely as planned, although weather and obtaining diplomatic clearance were issues. In future, many of the problems encountered could be resolved by an earlier start to the planning. We would like to acknowledge the contribution of all the national institutes and industry representatives, as well as national authorities for making the scientific quota available for the surveys. Finally, the KFO would like to extend many thanks to the skippers and crews on the vessels who were all greatly supportive of the work.

ACRUNET – The Brown Crab Project

ACRUNET finished on June 30, 2015, three years after its preparatory meeting in Dublin. However, the roots of ACRUNET go back much further. In 2008 a group of KFO crab fishermen attended a meeting in Edinburgh called by the Scottish Crab and Lobster Commercial Strategy Group to discuss the very serious financial and market problems being encountered by the industry at that time.

They found crab fishermen from Ireland, Scotland, England and Wales were all experiencing similar issues, and whereas before that meeting each group blamed the other for low prices, in fact, they had far more in common than dividing them. There followed several more meetings with ever-increasing trust and co-operation but it was acknowledged that the key player – their French counterparts – needed to be included. Finally, in January 2010, an initial meeting of the fishing sector, buyers, development agencies and representative organisations met in Paris and identified three main issues which needed to be tackled: the market, the quality of crab being sent to market and the lack of effective crab fishery management in UK and Ireland.

These were not problems which could be solved by occasional informal meetings so KFO undertook to explore ways and means to address the identified problems. The Atlantic Area Transnational Programme (INTERREG IVb) was the ideal mechanism for the challenges; it catered specifically for Atlantic coastal areas where crab was being fished and it could facilitate both technical investigations and marketing enterprises. A condition of INTERREG projects is the Lead Partner must be a Public Body; Bord Iascaigh Mhara undertook the role as it was already involved with the original group of fishermen. A submission for the Atlantic Area Programme was prepared in collaboration with colleagues from the UK, France, Spain and Portugal and approved in March 2012.

ACRUNET set about its core issues of improving the market, product quality and fisheries management, with a series of Activities including innovations in transport, an assessment of processed crab products and how they were presented, utilisation of crab waste and innovative promotional materials.

A lack of consistent grading, resulting in poor and inconsistent quality of brown crab on the market, was a regular complaint from consumers, particularly in the critically important French market. Addressing this issue was high on the list of ACRUNET priorities; the Responsibly Sourced Standard (RSS), Responsible Fishing Scheme (RFS) and Pêcheur Responsable were existing seafood standards in Ireland, the UK and France. The three national

standards were similar enough in content and objectives in order to establish the common ground on which to build a transnational brown crab standard. A common Annex was written and a French translation provided. The European Brown Crab Standard was agreed at a seminal meeting of the industry stakeholders in Portsmouth in February 2014. To support and assist the fishing sector in achieving the Standard, a guide on handling and grading was produced. This guide is largely graphic with a minimum of text to emphasise the transnational nature of the publication but it has also been translated into French, Spanish and Portuguese. In addition, a short film has been produced illustrating the grading and handling aboard a Donegal crabber working in the Atlantic Area. Since the launch of the European Brown Crab Standard almost 40 vessels have been audited and certified.

The ACRUNET network was disappointed that more headway was not made in the area of crab fishery management. The French industry felt its model should be adopted by all jurisdictions but this was not feasible. They have urged the UK and Ireland to use all possible avenues, such as the NWWAC and NSAC, to exert pressure on national authorities to implement more stringent management measures. However, both Ireland and the UK were pleased that ACRUNET scientific partners were finally able to produce an assessment of Latent Effort for both fleets, and Ireland was pleased with the MSC pre-assessment carried out by the Marine Institute where it was evident that the MSC framework would work quite well as a management model if regulatory issues could be tackled.

ACRUNET has produced detailed Technical Reports and non-technical summaries of all the work which has been carried out. The summaries will be available in print format and the Technical Reports will be downloadable from the ACRUNET website (www.acrunet.eu). These materials will also be available on the Atlantic Area Transnational Programme (<http://atlanticprojects.ccdr-n.pt/project-area/acrunet/public-documents>). The ACRUNET project ends officially on June 30, but the partners will continue to engage on the important issues and will maintain the network which has proved so important to all the stakeholders.

Recommendations Issued by Member States Group on Demersal Discards Implementation

KFO has participated proactively at all stages of discussions, and contributed as positively as possible, to the debate on implementation of the discards ban. Since January 2015 the pelagic sector has been obliged to observe the landings obligation but, since the pelagic fisheries were acknowledged to have the least issues in this regard, its problems are minimal compared to those in store for mixed demersal fisheries which will be subject to the discards ban from January 1, 2016.

In line with current Common Fisheries Policy, the implementation of the landings obligation in North Western Waters has been approached on a regional basis. The Member States concerned are Belgium, France, Ireland, the Netherlands, Spain and the United Kingdom, and are referred to collectively as the North Western Waters Group (NWWG). The NWWG consists of three tiers: Directors of Fisheries, a Technical Group and a Control Group. The Group has engaged with the North Western Waters Advisory Council (NWWAC) during the process. The NWWG has prepared a Joint Recommendation on a progressive implementation of a discards plan for demersal stocks starting on January 1, 2016 with certain stocks.

The NWWG Joint Recommendation as it stands is concerned only with those species which are defined in the Common Fisheries Policy, namely the highly mixed cod, haddock, whiting and saithe fishery; Norway lobster (*nephrops*) fishery; mixed common sole and plaice fishery and hake fisheries. It has recommended a phased implementation starting on January 1, 2016 with haddock in areas VI and VII; whiting in the Celtic Sea; *Nephrops* all areas; sole all areas, and hake all areas. The objective is to build on species defined in these fisheries and add additional species progressively. The NWWG decided that a combination of gear type and historic landings was the basis for defining the species which would be subject to the landings obligation and thresholds would be based on the data from the reference period 2013 to 2014. Vessels with landings above the specified threshold are defined as targeting the relevant species.

However, KFO has several serious concerns with the approach adopted by the NWWG. Firstly, KFO contends the use of vessel landings data for all species to define fisheries is a flawed system and will not work long term. Industry has already proposed an effective and fully controllable alternative whereby the vessel skipper will declare which fisheries will be prosecuted in advance of each fishing trip. This proposal, which could be easily implemented and monitored, has not been accepted. Likewise, KFO lists other areas, such as survivability exemptions, control and enforcement, the trans-boundary issues between discards plans for the North Sea, South Western Waters and North Western Waters and interpretation of the *de minimus* as defined in the CFP regulation Article 15.5, which could cause chaos in future years and render the landings obligation unmanageable and ineffective.

New Board May 2015

The KFO held its Annual General meeting on May 29, 2015 in Bruach na Mara. After the AGM the Board met to elect a Chairman and co-opt Directors onto the Board.

The new Board of Directors is as follows: Michael Cavanagh, Chairman; Pete McBride, Vice-Chairman; Cathal Boyle, Jens Bach, Martin Howley, Ciaran Doherty, Pauric Conneely, Tony Byrne, Eamonn McHugh.

Editorial

by Sean O'Donoghue

CHIEF EXECUTIVE, KFO



ICES issued its advice for demersal and herring stocks for 2016 on June 30 (see article page one.)

The big surprise which is extremely disappointing is the zero-catch advice for the new combined herring stock in Area VI and VIIbc. This most certainly does not reflect the very large shoals we are encountering in the southern part of VIa which is included as information from the fishing industry in the benchmark process. Despite the best efforts of the scientists it was impossible to split the stocks during the benchmark process hence the new combined assessment. Unfortunately ICES is advising zero TAC for 2016 based on this new combined assessment. This is not acceptable and has to be addressed as a matter of urgency by the Minister. A rebuilding plan allowing for directed fishery next year and taking into account the social and economic consequences of zero catch should be immediately developed.

The 2015 problem of the zero herring TAC for VIa south, VIIbc still remains. Now that ICES is advising a combined assessment we are seeking that part of the 22,690 tonnes allocated to VIa north is transferred to VIa south, VIIbc for the autumn of 2015.

I expect the Council and Commission Declaration, and Minister's Coveney commitment of last December, regarding this herring fishery to be honoured. In the meantime, KFO is supporting a genetics-based study to try to clarify the different components of the herring stocks in these areas.

The development of genetic tools in the area of fisheries science has taken an enormous leap forward in recent years. This approach could provide incontrovertible data for differentiating between different stocks, their ranges and their inter-relationships, which can be translated into firm assessments of stocks and their performance. Much of the progress has been enabled by the huge reduction in costs and the improvement in the techniques themselves. KFO can be justly proud to be at the forefront in this area with the boarfish stock identification project being carried out on our behalf by Dr Ed Farrell and his UCD colleagues. There is an exciting new proposal to take this even further and develop large scale stock ID applications in key fisheries. This

project proposes to address the expensive, technical and time-consuming problem of sampling individual fish by simply extracting DNA from the water in the RSW tank. The possibilities for this technology are endless.

I have serious concerns regarding the NWW Demersal Discards Plan. The criteria used to define fisheries based on total landings per vessel during 2013 and 2014 cannot work effectively year on year. The industry has already proposed an alternative which would be effective and fully controllable and give skippers enough flexibility to work within the constraints of the landing obligation. We are also concerned with some of the other recommendations from the NWW Group of Member States and urge these to be addressed sooner rather than later.

The review of marine taxation, commissioned by the Minister for Finance, is long overdue but better late than never. The current taxation system for the fishing sector is completely out of step with comparable industries and a serious hindrance to growth and development within the sector. The Irish industry has made a submission to the consultancy firm carrying out the review on behalf of the Minister for Finance in this regard and suggested measures which would place the sector on a sustainable and efficient footing.

We welcome the launch of the 2025 Agri-Food Strategy by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine which outlines the key actions required to ensure that the agri-seafood sector maximises its contribution to overall economic growth, job creation and environmental sustainability over the coming decade and builds upon the progress achieved under Food Harvest 2020. Additional raw material supply, value-adding and the necessary scale of operations have never been fully exploited by our seafood sector but with this road-map we can finally realise its full potential and generate much needed sustainable employment in coastal peripheral areas.

KFO played an important role in the recent Mackerel Egg Survey project (see page two.) Full surveys in 2010 and 2013 had shown that spawning is starting earlier and the spawning peak occurs earlier than previously observed. It is essential that this data is accurate as stock predictions and subsequent TAC and Quota are based on this information. KFO was instrumental in getting industry buy-in from the other countries involved and wishes to thank the *MFV Atlantic Challenge* for agreeing to do the survey.

Important Dates June-September 2015

July 1	Industry/Science Partnership Meeting	Dublin
July 2	Launch Agri-Food Strategy 2025	Dublin
July 7-9	Presentation of ICES Advice	Edinburgh
July 8	NWWAC, WG 1, 2 & 4	Edinburgh
July 8	Pelagic AC, WG 1 & 2	The Hague
July 9	NWWAC, WG 3, Ex Com	Edinburgh
July 9	Pelagic AC, Ex Com	The Hague
July 9	Commissioner Vella Visit to Ireland	Galway
July 10-11	Harnessing Our Ocean Wealth Conference	Ringaskiddy, Cork
July 13	Fisheries Council	Brussels
July 17	Monthly Whitefish Quota Meeting plus Quota Management Technical Conservation Measures Discards Implementation Group	Dublin/Clonakilty
Aug 1	Blessing of the Fleet	Killybegs
Aug 25-31	WGWIDE (Pelagic Stocks)	Spain
Sept 14-16	Advice Drafting Group Widely Distributed Stocks	Copenhagen
Sep 16-17	NWWAC, General Assembly	Dublin
Sep 30	ICES Advice (Pelagic Stocks)	Copenhagen

Head Office: Killybegs Fishermen's Organisation Ltd.,
 Bruach na Mara, St. Catherine's Road, Killybegs, Co. Donegal.
 Tel: (074) 9731 089, (074) 9731 305, Fax: (074) 9731 577,
 Email: kfo@kfo.ie Website: www.kfo.ie
 Dublin Office Tel: (01) 825 8846, Fax: (01) 825 8847