



## ICES Releases Advice for Widely Distributed Stocks in 2012

In September 2012, ICES released advice for widely distributed stocks. The stocks concerned were mackerel, western horse mackerel, North Sea horse mackerel, blue whiting, Atlanto-Scandian herring, boarfish and sea bass. The advice is quoted below for each stock.

### Mackerel

"ICES advises on the basis of the Norway, Faroe Islands, and EU management plan that catches in 2013 should be between 497,000 tonnes and 542,000 tonnes." The advice in 2012 was for catches between 586,000 tonnes and 639,000 tonnes, which means 2013 catches drop by 15 per cent.

ICES advise that the existing measures to protect the North Sea spawning component should remain in place.

As supporting information, ICES includes information from the fishing industry. "Over the last four years the pelagic industry has encountered large shoals of mackerel over the entire distribution area. This is not confined to

one area or one fleet. Based on its qualitative information from the fishing grounds the industry is of the firm view that the abundance of mackerel is increasing. The industry is also seeing signs of very good recruitment (above average) over the last number of years, particularly in 2009 and 2010. It is the opinion of the industry that the stock size continues to be underestimated. The widespread distribution over the entire area creates problems with unwanted by-catches for some fleets targeting species other than mackerel. Stakeholders are actively seeking mechanisms that would allow inclusion of fishing industry information into the assessment process, and are involved in a number of pilot projects in this regard."

### Western horse mackerel

"ICES advises on the basis of the MSY approach that catches in 2013 should be no more than 126,000 tonnes." This is a drop of 40 per cent on the recommended catch of 211,000 tonnes in 2012.

### North Sea horse mackerel

"Based on ICES approach to data-limited stocks, ICES advises that catches of horse mackerel in Divisions IIIa, IVb, c and VIII d (North Sea stock) should be no more than 25,500 tonnes." There was no recommended catch for 2012.

### Blue whiting

"ICES advises on the basis of the management plan agreed by Norway, the EU, the Faroe Islands and Iceland, that catches in 2013 should be no more than 643,000 tonnes." This is an increase of 62 per cent on the recommended catch of 391,000 tonnes in 2012.

### Atlanto-Scandian herring

"ICES advises on the basis of the management plan of EU, Faroe Islands, Iceland, Norway and Russia that landings in 2013 should be no more than 619,000 tonnes." This is a drop of 26 per cent on the recommended catch of 833,000 tonnes in 2012.

### Boarfish

"ICES advises on the basis of the MSY approach that catches in 2013 should be no more than 82,000 tonnes." There is no change from 2012.

### Sea bass (Northeast Atlantic)

"ICES advises on the basis of the approach to data-limited stocks that commercial catches should be no more than 6,000 tonnes. ICES recommend that implementation of 'input' controls should be promoted. This is the first year ICES is providing quantitative advice for data-limited stocks."

The Commission has indicated it may bring forward a TAC & Quota proposal for this species for 2013. Should this happen, it is very likely Ireland will receive a zero TAC due to its historical ban on fishing sea bass.

## Congratulations



Sean O'Donoghue, CEO, Killybegs Fishermen's Organisation Ltd., receives Person of the Year Award 2012 from Cormac Burke, Fishing News International.

## European Parliament Imposes Sanctions

The European Parliament and the Council of Fisheries Ministers have voted in favour of sanction measures to be imposed on countries or territories engaged in unsustainable fishing practices. This action is largely in response to the reckless and irresponsible behaviour of the Faroe Islands and Iceland in pursuing an unrestrained mackerel fishery since 2008, with total disregard for responsible management and scientific advice. Both Iceland and the Faroe Islands have massively increased their catches of mackerel in recent years, with Icelandic catches going from 363 tonnes in 2005 to just under 147,000 tonnes in 2011. Likewise, the Faros have increased their mackerel catches from 27,830 tonnes in 2009 to 150,000 tonnes in 2011. The combined effect of these catches amount to almost 46 per cent of the scientifically advised catch opportunities for 2011. Again in 2012, Iceland and Faros have set huge autonomous quotas of approximately 300,000 tonnes.

The trade measures which can be imposed on a country or territory fishing in an unsustainable manner includes the following:

1. Quantitative restrictions on the importations of fish into the EU including the stock of common interest and associated species;
2. The definition of associated species is broadly defined to cover a range of species not just mackerel and is based on FAO rules;
3. Further measures can be applied under the scope of the Regulation, if the initial measures prove to be ineffective;
4. Restrictions on the use of EU ports by vessels flying the flag of the country or territory deemed to be over-fishing;
5. Restrictions on the use of EU ports by vessels transporting fish and fishery products from the stock of common interest and associated species;
6. Ban on the sale of fishing vessels, fishing equipment and supplies to the country or territory deemed to be overfishing; and
7. Ban on reflagging of fishing vessels from an EU Member State to a country or territory deemed to be overfishing.

## Mackerel Negotiations

Commissioner Damanaki met with representatives of Norway, Iceland and the Faroe Islands in London on September 3 last, but there was no significant progress made on the mackerel share out. The mackerel issue has and continues to be a key priority for the KFO. We will continue to devote a considerable amount of time to the issue and to actively lobby at all appropriate levels to get a fair and equitable deal in accordance with the 11 principles set out below that we have agreed with our EU and Norwegian industry colleagues. Commissioner Damanaki was presented with detailed information on these principles at a meeting on August 27 and she appears to have adopted a more robust stance towards Iceland and Faros.

The 11 principles on which an agreement on the management of the mackerel stock must be based are:

1. Fresh start of the negotiations (earlier offers made by EU and/or Norway are not valid anymore);
2. No reward for bad behavior;
3. The demands by Iceland and Faroe Islands are unjustified;
4. Zero access for Iceland in EU and Norwegian waters;
5. Time is working against Iceland;
6. Sharing agreement between all parties – no partial agreement;
7. New arrangement must be made for a limited period;
8. Direct application of sanction measures by the EU and Norway;
9. EU-accession talks with Iceland must be adjourned;
10. Blue whiting sharing arrangement must be revised; and
11. Greenland must not be granted Coastal State status nor be part of a future sharing arrangement.

In July the FV *Father McKee* undertook the second dedicated boarfish survey to acoustically measure the size of the spawning stock in western waters. Onboard were scientists from the Marine Institute led by Ciaran O'Donnell, Fisheries Ecosystems Advisory Services, and a boarfish research biologist from the KFO.

Geographical coverage extended from 59°N to 47°30N including the Porcupine Bank. The RV *Celtic Explorer* undertook the northern component (north of 53°30N) as part of the Marine Institute's annual summer herring survey, while the the FV *Father McKee* surveyed the core area to the south (see Figure 1.)

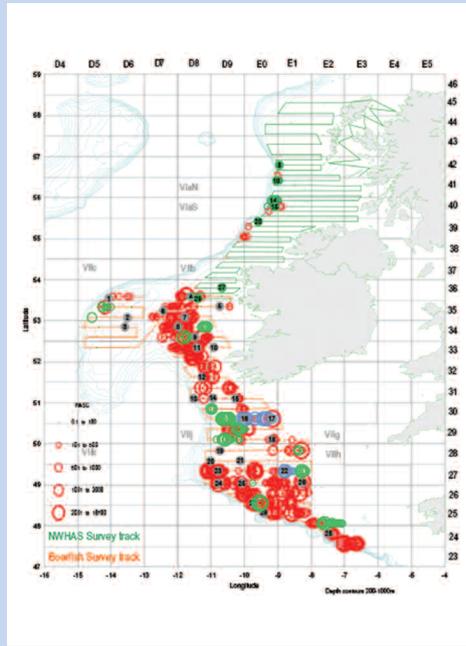


Figure 1. Boarfish distribution 2012 and position of trawl hauls (numbered).

In total 3,921nmi (nautical miles) of cruise track was covered, using 61 transects relating to a total area coverage of over 51,500nmi<sup>2</sup>. Transect spacing was set at 15nmi (*Father McKee*) and 7.5nmi (*C. Explorer*).

Peripheral areas in the north and offshore on the Porcupine Bank were found to contain low density clusters of boarfish schools which contributed just over one per cent to the total stock biomass (TSB).

The Western region (52°-54°N) was characterised by large numbers of high-density, monospecific schools along the western fringe. This area contained over 47 per cent of the total number of schools detected, including the largest single density school observed overall. In total, the western region contributed over 42 per cent to the TSB.

The southern region (50°-47°30N) covered the largest geographical area and contained numerous high and medium density

monospecific schools. The southern region featured two prominent sub areas. The first, on-shelf between 50°-51°N, is centred on the 'redfish Banks' and historically has accounted for a large proportion of Irish landings. The second sub area, between 49°30N and 47°30N, covers a wider area and contained the largest proportion of biomass for the southern region. Combined, the Southern region accounted for 56.5 per cent of the total biomass observed.

Survey methodology was refined in 2012 based on our experiences of boarfish behaviour and distribution during the spawning period. One major refinement was the switch to daylight-only surveying when boarfish schools are more easily detected using acoustic equipment. Geographical coverage was concentrated on core areas along the shelf edge and away from peripheral areas in the eastern Celtic Sea.

A total of 36 survey trawls were undertaken during the combined survey. In total, 5,952 lengths and 1,997 length/weight measurements were taken in addition to 897 boarfish otoliths collected for ageing.

Overall the stock was dominated by the following age classes in terms of abundance: 20+, 12, 10 and 9 & 13 year old fish and 20+, 12, 16 and 10 years in terms of biomass. The age profile of the stock from survey data is in close agreement with samples taken from the fishery.

Size structure of boarfish within trawl catches showed a trend towards larger fish further north and a broader length range further south. This size trend is consistent with previous observations from 2011 and with commercial catch data. Very few immature (<9.7cm TL) boarfish were observed overall and represented 0.2 percent of the total biomass. As this survey only targets spawning mature boarfish, it is not a reliable means of determining immature boarfish abundance.

The total number of schools detected in 2012 was 17 per cent higher than in 2011 and the size of those schools, in terms of acoustic density was greater within core spawning areas. As a result the total biomass was more than 47 per cent higher than in 2011 for comparable geographical coverage.

**On September 18, the three European fishing industry organisations, EAPO, Europêche and Cogeca, in a united approach, launched a new and innovative proposal to address the issue of discards in an effective and workable manner. The catalyst for this proposal arose from the unworkable and ineffective proposals of both the EU Commission and the Council of Fisheries Ministers.**

The discards ban proposal from the Commission appears to have become the symbol of the CFP reform against which the success of the reform will possibly be measured. Unfortunately, the polarization of the discards debate, its adoption by those unlikely champions whose enthusiasm is not matched by their comprehension, and the failure to regard discards as another tool in a range of fisheries management options, has done little or nothing for a rational approach to the issue.

In his role as Chairman of EAPO, Sean O'Donoghue addressed a high-level discussion group in Brussels, hosted by MEPs whose constituents will be directly affected by the discards ban, where he outlined the alternative proposal from the combined fishing industry organisations. The discussion highlighted the complex nature of discards, which could never be successfully addressed by the simplistic approach "ban discards" or "obligation to land all catches." The fishing industry is aware of and supports the concept of reducing discards but points out the complexity of what actually constitutes "discards" as an issue that needs to be integrated into a workable solution.

To this end, the European fishing industry proposes an alternative route based on the key principles of avoidance and minimisation supported by incentives. In practice, the obligation to land all catches would only apply in certain instances and would run as part of avoidance and minimisation programmes on a fishery-by-fishery basis. This proposal is not intended as an "opt-out," as the obligation to land all catches would be applied in a targeted manner focused on stocks at, or moving into danger of, depletion based on customary scientific advice; individual fishery management plans would include obligatory discard reductions with de *minimis* targets over a pre-determined period. A realistic timeframe would be

January 2015 to January 2019, at which point the obligation to land all catches could be applied to any fishery which has not achieved its discard reduction target but where the targets have been reached there should be no further discard reductions required.

To underpin the European industry proposal, each member state would be required to produce a discards atlas with the actual discards levels in their fisheries/species for reference purposes and, where that necessary data is not already available, a member state would be obliged to collect these objective discards data for that specific fishery/species. Ireland has led the way in this regard with the production of "Atlas of Demersal Discarding" which provides a comprehensive overview of discard issues. The member states would undertake to participate in, and assume responsibility for, the setting up of Management Plans, including discards reduction objectives.

Examples of avoidance and minimisation techniques in action, such as the Porcupine Bank Nephrops Closure, the Celtic Sea Cod Box Closure and the use of devices such as the Swedish Grid were used to illustrate the effectiveness of this approach to reducing discards, and the presentation ended with a final warning on the complexity of the discard issue and the attempt to solve it with a simplistic solution such as a "discard ban" compared to the industry proposal which could deliver an effective answer leading to greater stock sustainability.

#### Reference:

1. "Atlas of Demersal Discarding: Scientific Observations and Potential Solutions" Norman Graham, Marine Institute, Ireland, EC Technical Meeting on Discards, May 2, 2012

## Amendments to Technical Conservation Measures Regulation (850/98)

Technical measures are rules governing how and where fishermen may fish and include rules on types of fishing gear, closed areas and other measures to protect the marine environment. Since a number of important technical measures, contained in EU Regulation 850/98 "for the conservation of fishery resources through technical measures for the protection of juveniles of marine organisms," expire on December 31, 2012, the Commission has adopted a proposal to ensure that these technical measures are maintained in place after this date. This proposal follows two previous regulations which provided temporary transitional extension to Regulation 850/98 by 18 months each, but this current proposal is of indeterminate duration and is intended to safeguard existing technical measures until such time as a comprehensive revision of this area can be brought forward under the reformed Common Fisheries Policy.

Industry has had long-standing issues with many of the measures in the existing regulations and welcomes the Commission's proposal. Unfortunately, the Commission's proposal does not address our key concerns, particularly in Area VIa. Pat the Cope Gallagher, MEP, in his role as Rapporteur to the EU Parliament Fisheries Committee, presented a report to the Commission with a number of suggested amendments on September 19 last. These

amendments do take on board many of our concerns; for example, this report advocates changes to the defined area in VIa (the Cod Line). It has been shown that this line has not had a beneficial effect on the Cod Recovery Plan -- it has not had the effect of reducing fishing mortality on cod though there has been a significant reduction in effort.

There is also an amendment to reinstate the use of gill and tangle nets and a provision for catching Lesser Spotted Dogfish which we welcome since this gear is crucial to small inshore vessels which do not target cod or whiting and will have almost zero impact on these stocks. Removal of by-catch provisions and an important amendment in relation to mesh sizes, a crucial issue to vessels fishing in the northwest, are also included. A further amendment on mesh sizes proposes the inclusion of appropriate mesh size for small pelagic fish -- Orders Myctophiformes and Stomiiformes -- to pre-empt this being an issue in the future.

This Commission proposal is currently being actively discussed in both the European Parliament and Council of Ministers, and KFO hopes this time round will bring some of the changes we have urgently sought over the last four years.

## The 2012 Boarfish Assessment

In 2011, boarfish was considered by the ICES Working Group on Widely Distributed Stocks (WGWIDE) for the first time. An exploratory assessment was produced and the group concluded that the boarfish stock was a large, widely distributed stock that was not over-exploited at that time. These conclusions led to the 2012 TAC being set at 82,000 tonnes, which was an increase on the precautionary TAC of 33,000 tonnes that had been set in 2011. Though the increase in TAC was significant it was still considered to be precautionary and in line with the developing nature of the fishery. In August 2012, the Pelagic RAC submitted a management plan for boarfish to the EU. This management plan has not yet been evaluated by ICES and as such could not be used as the basis for the 2013 catch advice.

Expectations for the 2012 WGWIDE meeting were justifiably high given that a lot more data was available for the development of a proper stock assessment for boarfish. This data, which consisted of two dedicated boarfish acoustic surveys, more than 20 years of International Bottom Trawl Survey data and five years of catch data from the boarfish fishery, were compiled and analysed using a specifically designed statistical model. The model, which was similar to that in the recently benchmarked Megrim assessment, provided a stock size estimate of approximately 692,000 tonnes in 2012 and precautionary catch options for the 2013 fishery of c. 100,000 tonnes. It should be noted that at this stage of the development of the assessment model, there was a high degree of statistical uncertainty associated with the estimates. This was reflected in the precautionary nature of the proposed catch options, which were accepted by WGWIDE and published in the boarfish chapter of the 2012 WGWIDE report.

Subsequent to the 2012 meeting, the boarfish chapter of the WGWIDE report was sent by the ICES Advisory Committee for an independent peer review. The review was very comprehensive and detailed a number of areas that may be addressed in future boarfish assessments at WGWIDE. It is important to note that the review did not discredit the use of the model or its inputs i.e. catch data, IBTS surveys and acoustic surveys. However, the reviewers did suggest that the assessment be put forward as a basis for advice for 2013. Taking up the reviewers report, the resulting ICES advice, which was published on September 28, was based solely on the 2012 acoustic survey biomass estimate. It will be a source of regret that so much hard work was not found to be acceptable by ICES for framing advice for 2013. However, if followed, the advice will ensure stable catches for at least another year. The overall approach being taken by ICES to advising on boarfish is "slow up and fast down." In other words, cautious expansion in catches.



# Editorial

by Sean O'Donoghue

CHIEF EXECUTIVE, KFO



The ICES scientific advice for widely distributed stocks was issued on September 28 (see article page one.) The advice issued for mackerel, horse mackerel and Atlanto Scandia herring are for reductions, with a large increase in blue whiting and status quo for boarfish.

The mackerel advice is not surprising given that the catch for 2011 was 930,000 tonnes, as against ICES advice of 630,000 tonnes, due to unjustified autonomous quotas of 300,000 tonnes set by Iceland and Faros. However, the stock size of approximately 2.5 million tonnes estimated by ICES does not reflect the reality on the fishing grounds where the pelagic industry is encountering large shoals of fish over the entire distribution area and is also seeing increasing abundance on the grounds of juvenile fish indicating very good recruitment.

The ICES advice for horse mackerel based on MSY rather than on the management plan advocating a 40 per cent reduction does not make sense. The management plan gives a status quo situation and is specifically designed to avoid the massive fluctuations inherent in using MSY. If the MSY approach was used in 2011 and 2012 rather than the management plan, the TAC would have been increased by 21 and 11 per cent respectively.

The initial indication from the Commission is that it will follow the management plan as it has done over the previous five years.

The status quo boarfish advice for next year is incredible given that the acoustic survey was very positive (see article page two) and the huge amount of work done by the scientists over the last three years in developing an ageing method, target strength measurement and an assessment methodology. Furthermore, the PRAC has developed a boarfish management plan with the assistance of the scientists which unfortunately has not yet been evaluated by ICES and is not considered in the ICES advice for next year. Similar to mackerel, the abundance of boarfish on the fishing grounds is not reflected in the ICES advice. It will now be difficult to achieve the expected increase in the TAC for next year however with the intervention of the interested stakeholders including the PRAC and hopefully with the support of Irish and Danish Ministers a TAC higher than this year's 82,000 tonnes could still be agreed at the December Fisheries Council.



The European fishing industry organisations launched a new and innovative proposal to address the issue of discards in an effective and workable manner on September 18 (see article page three.) The catalyst for this proposal arose from the unworkable and ineffective proposals of both the EU Commission and the European Council of Fisheries Ministers. The industry proposal has put forward an alternative approach that addresses in meaningful and effective fashion the complex and multi-faceted issue of discards rather than the simplistic and populist approach of banning discards. A key difference between the industry proposal and the Commission's and Council's proposals is that the obligation to land all catches (discards ban by another name) comes at the end of the process of avoidance and minimisation measures, where these measures fail to fully address the discards issue rather than at the start as envisaged in the Commission's and Council proposals. In my view, the detailed industry proposal fully addresses the discards issue in an effective and practical way on a fishery by fishery basis and will, if adopted, lead to greater stock sustainability.

Both the European Parliament and Council of Fisheries Ministers have adopted sanctions measures to be imposed on countries or territories engaged in unsustainable fishing practices. The key driver behind this regulation is the reckless and irresponsible actions of the Faros and Iceland in pursuing an unrestrained mackerel fishery since 2008 with total disregard for responsible management and scientific advice. Mackerel is Ireland's number one economic fishery and the adoption is an important step in ensuring that we have a sustainable and viable fishery for the future. Our immediate concern in this regard is stopping the reckless and irresponsible behaviour of Iceland and the Faros in pursuing an unrestrained mackerel fishery. The ICES advice for mackerel next year (see article page one and above) showing a minimum 15 per cent reduction highlights that immediate action is required to stop this reckless and irresponsible behaviour. The EU must now send a very clear message to Iceland and the Faros that unless they are prepared to return to the negotiating table to have real and meaningful negotiations, the adopted sanction measures will be implemented to the full extent without delay.

The opportunity exists to resolve by the end of this year the transitional technical conservation measures that have been in place since 2009 and have caused a huge difficulty for our whitefish industry particularly in area VIa (see article page three.) The opportunities arise out of the fact that these, and a number of other measures, will fail unless the EP and Council agree to a new set of transitional technical conservation measures by the end of the year. Perhaps at last we will get the required changes to these measures that we have been continually lobbying for over the last four years.

## Important Dates October, November & December 2012

DATE	MEETINGS	VENUE
October 3	PELRAC – NPWG	Amsterdam
October 4	PELRAC – WG1, WGII	Amsterdam
October 5	PELRAC –GA & Executive Committee	Amsterdam
October 9	FIF meeting SFPA	Cork
October 10-11	Launch ACRUNET Project	Dublin
October 12	Industry/Science Partnership	Dublin
October 16-17	Coastal States Blue Whiting	London
October 17	ACFA WG III Markets	Brussels
October 18-19	Coastal States Atlanto Scandia Herring	London
October 19	NWWRAC meeting Commission State of Stocks	Brussels
October 19	Whitefish Quota Management meeting	Dublin
October 22-23	Fisheries Council	Luxembourg
October 22-24	Mackerel Coastal States	London
November 12-16	NEAFC	London
November 19-24	EU/Norway Negotiations 1st Round	Brussels
December 3-7	EU/Norway Negotiations 2nd Round	Bergen
December 11	Extended Bureau EAPO	Brussels
December 12	Bureau ACFA	Brussels
December 12	Plenary ACFA	Brussels
December 17-19	Fisheries Council	Brussels

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