



## The Irish Seafood Industry Needs Immediate Action on the Fuel Crisis

## KFO Proposes a 'New Approach' to Floating Offshore Wind Development in the Northwest

**The persistent upward spiral of fuel prices is impacting all commercial life and poses an unprecedented threat to many Irish businesses. The seafood industry is highly dependent on a fuel supply which is both stable and available. Neither requirement is being met since early 2022 and the industry is facing a crisis situation.**

Representatives of all sectors of the seafood industry – Producer Organisations, Aquaculture, Inshore groups and processors – participated in a virtual meeting with Minister McConalogue on July 6 last to discuss the rapidly deteriorating situation, but the outcome was far from encouraging. The basis of the case being made by industry was the recognised “break-even” price of fuel for the majority of fishing vessels of €0.60 per litre and which is now running at somewhere between €1.10 and €1.20 per litre with occasional spikes of even higher prices. In addition, other sectors within the seafood supply chain are suffering in a similar fashion which is driving rising additional costs, such as maintenance and other vessel running costs, at the same time. The cost of fish to the consumer has risen rapidly which is likely to create a worsening market in the near future. All in all, the future of Irish seafood looks bleak.

The industry representatives pointed out the very positive actions some of Ireland's neighbours and seafood market competitors took. France and Spain reacted very quickly once the rising fuel prices became evident with substantial financial support for fuel costs. The EU ensured there were no obstacles for Member State using the available funds remaining in the EMFF programme to address this specific problem.

Following their virtual meeting, the delegation which engaged with the Minister said, “The Minister has no excuse now, in light of overwhelming European Parliament vote, not to use the funds available in the EMFF to immediately implement a national scheme to cover the additional costs, particularly fuel. Not to do so is a major threat to the survival of the fishing/seafood sector and the coastal communities dependent on the sector which is worth €1.26 billion to the Irish economy.”

Killybegs Fishermen's Organisation (KFO), along with its close neighbour, Sinbad Marine Services, are determined to bring a new approach to Offshore Renewable Energy (ORE) in Donegal. This innovative approach to offshore wind development is based on a number of key principles which will ensure that existing fishing industry in the northwest is not only protected but will continue to thrive in conjunction with the ancillary industries as a result of its access to renewable energy tailored to its needs.

The KFO, in developing this new approach, set out six key principles namely: involvement from the very start; no lines on maps; only interested in offshore wind projects; biodiversity to be protected with no detrimental impact on fish stocks with no limitation on access to traditional fishing grounds; significant benefits to the local community and seafood sector that are both transformative and long lasting, and developing Killybegs as a hub for alternative energy such as hydrogen.

The first, and critical step, for this project was taken with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with a global floating offshore wind developer and technology provider, Hexicon AB who fully accepted the KFO's six key principles. The basis of this innovative and historic partnership is the 'new approach' which sees local fishermen engaged and influencing the development process at all stages.

Key decisions, including site selection, cable routing, and land fall, will be collectively analysed and agreed. This will require significant data inputs. In this regard, together with Science Foundation Ireland, Hexicon are co-funding an 18-month research project to build a multi-objective decision-making and constraint mapping tool. Earth sciences researchers from UCC and UCD along with GIS experts are managing this project. Similarly, other stakeholders, including environmental organisations will also be given input at a very early stage in shaping the location and design of the floating offshore wind development. In parallel, long-established port operator and

## Successful Outcome to Northwest Herring Benchmark Assessment

marine service provider, Sinbad Marine, will ensure the floating offshore wind development maximises its engagement with local industry and leverages local infrastructure.

Floating wind energy is experiencing exponential growth globally and Irish waters are exceptionally well suited for the emerging technology. However, the global expansion of offshore wind farms is often a concern for fishing communities and cause for conflict. In that context and in order to avoid potential controversy, the KFO, Sinbad Marine Services and Hexicon are joining forces to create a 'new approach' for the development of floating offshore wind development. This is the first time in offshore wind development that key players from several fundamentally opposed sectors have come together to collaborate on a project with a common objective. The focus of the MoU is for the parties involved to cooperate and agree solutions which are mutually beneficial for the development of a wind farm which does not negatively impact the fishing industry nor the marine environment, while contributing to the transformation of local and global energy supply chains. The offshore floating wind development will be located more than 50km off the Donegal coast with the potential to deliver up to 2 gigawatts (GW) of energy.

**It's been a long road, but we are finally starting to see the positive outcome of all the effort that has gone into the Northwest Herring over the past number of years. As you'll know, the Benchmark Workshop on North Sea and Celtic Sea stocks (WKNSCS 2022), which considered the Northwest (6.a.S, 7.b-c) Herring, was conducted in February (7-11) with the aim of developing new assessments for the Herring in Divisions 6.a, 7.b-c. The results of the recent herring genetics project were central to this as they enabled splitting of the Malin Shelf Herring Acoustic Survey (MSHAS) data into separate survey indices for the 6.a.S, 7.b-c herring and the 6.a.N autumn spawning herring. This facilitated the development of separate stock assessments for the two stocks.**

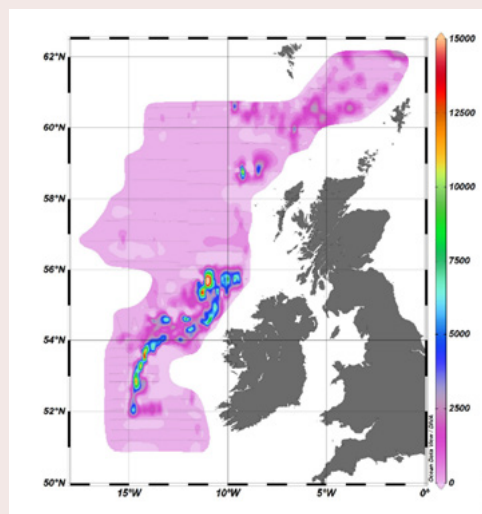
Unfortunately, it was not possible to conduct a full analytical stock assessment on the stocks as the assessment models available were not able to handle the relatively short time series and the disparity between the large survey abundance and the recent low catches, which were constrained under the monitoring TAC. These provided conflicting signals and the assessment outputs were unrealistically low. Therefore, it was decided to move to ICES Category 3 advice which is based on abundance trends. The approach to developing advice for Category 3 stocks has recently been changed by ICES and these stocks were among the first to apply the new approach, which is largely based on survey abundance estimates, recent catch and a length based biological indicator. These are used to calculate catch advice, which if it is 20 per cent higher than the previous year's advice or the average of the previous three years' catch is then subject to a stability clause. This clause limits the increase in advice to the average of the last three years catch +20 per cent.

Whilst this is not an ideal outcome, the main point is that we now have a separate

assessment for the Northwest (6.a.S, 7.b-c) herring. Instead of being delineated by incorrect geographic lines, the data will be split based on the most advanced genetic assignments, thus ensuring the validity of the data prior to assessment. This Category 3 approach was accepted at this year's ICES Herring Assessment Working Group (HAWG), which was delayed because of ICES' decision to stop all activities in March due to the war in Ukraine and the Russian involvement in some ICES WGs. HAWG eventually met in May and the separate assessments for the 6.a.S, 7.b-c and the 6.a.N autumn spawning herring were conducted. Whilst the 2023 advice is only a small increase on the monitoring TAC it will enable the fishery to reopen and will allow the assessment to be developed with accurate data over the next few years with a view to moving back to a Category 1 analytical age-based assessment. The acoustic survey estimates and the recent signs of strong recruitment all point towards a positive future for the Northwest herring and the industry will play a pivotal role in its continued sustainable development.

## International Blue Whiting Spawning Stock Survey (IBWSS) 2022

The annual International Blue Whiting Spawning Stock Survey (IBWSS) took place off the west coast in March and April again this year. The co-ordinated survey comprised four fisheries research vessels from Ireland, The Netherlands, Faroe Islands and Spain, and a chartered commercial vessel from Norway. Overall, weather conditions were exceptional compared to 2021, with calm seas prevailing, providing optimal conditions for acoustic recordings. The entire survey was completed in 15 days, well below the 21-day target threshold and the area coverage was considered comprehensive in both core and peripheral areas. Spanish survey effort, at the southern end of the survey area, was excluded from the final abundance estimate as it took place 21 days before the other vessels joined and so was considered temporally mismatched. This was due to the limited vessel availability in the mackerel egg survey year.



The estimated total stock biomass (TSB) of blue whiting for the 2022 survey was 2.7 million tonnes representing a total stock number (TSN) of  $31.4 \times 10^9$  individuals. This is a 15 per cent increase in TSB and a 56 per cent increase in TSN from the 2021 survey. The spawning stock biomass (SSB) was estimated at 2.4 million tonnes representing

a spawning stock number (SSN) of  $23.9 \times 10^9$  individuals. This is a 4 per cent increase in the observed SSB and a 33 per cent increase in the SSN compared to last year. Overall, the increase in abundance in the 2022 estimate was a result of the increased numbers of one- and two-year-old fish observed within the survey area. The abundance of these two year classes (2020 and 2021) were the highest in the time series and above the numbers associated with the 2014 record year class. So although the TSB was far short of the highs of 2018 and 2019 it is an encouraging sign for future years.

Also of note during this year's survey was the collection of baseline spawning genetic samples, which will be analysed as part of the European Reference Genome Atlas project. The aim is to use the same genetic approaches, that have proved successful for herring and horse mackerel, to finally unravel the population structure of blue whiting.



# ICES Issues 2023 Advice for Some Stocks

On June 30 ICES released the catch advice for some of the Celtic Sea, West of Scotland, Irish Sea and North Sea stocks for 2023. Full advice sheets are available on the ICES Latest Advice webpage (<https://www.ices.dk/advice>). Overall, the prospects for 2023 are not easy reading, with reductions across many of the demersal stocks and the only good news is the reinstatement of catch advice for the Northwest Herring.

As noted elsewhere in the newsletter the results of the herring genetic project have enabled separate assessments for the herring stocks in 6.a, 7.b-c to be reinstated and an advised TAC for each has been issued for the first time since 2014. Whilst the 6.a.S, 7.b-c advice is lower than hoped, it is a good starting point for re-

establishing the fishery and will enable cautious and sustainable expansion over the coming years. The 15 per cent increase advised for the 2022 catch for the Irish Sea herring has now been countered with a 14 per cent decrease in advice, highlighting the uncertainties in the current assessment model. The Celtic Sea

herring advice is for zero catch for the fourth year running and hopefully the monitoring TAC will be applied again in 2023 to enable collection of essential scientific samples. It will be important to include genetic sampling in this as there are unresolved issues with mixing between the Celtic and Irish Sea herring, which when addressed could change the perception of these stocks.

In terms of the demersal stocks, the advice for the stocks West of Scotland and Ireland is mixed but relatively stable with only minor fluctuations in the advice for haddock, whiting and megrim. Zero catch is again advised for cod and the issues of multiple stocks in Division 6.a and connectivity with the North Sea stock remain sources of uncertainty in the assessment.

The advice for the Irish Sea stocks is negative across all the species with cuts in cod, haddock, plaice and sole. The situation in the Celtic Sea is not much better with negative advice for haddock and 7.f-g plaice. The only increase in advice is for plaice in 7.h-k. Most significant is the 61 per cent reduction in the advised catch for whiting in the Celtic Sea, which is likely to cause issues for the fleet.

The advice for the other pelagic stocks, mackerel, horse mackerel, blue whiting and Atlanto scandia herring will be issued by ICES on September 30 and advice for monkfish and *Nephrops* on October 28.

Species	Stock	Divisions	2023 advice (tonnes)	% Change from 2022 advice
Herring	Northwest and West of Ireland	6.a.S, 7.b-c	≤ 1892	-
Herring	West of Scotland	6.a.N	≤ 1212	-
Herring	Irish Sea, Celtic Sea and southwest of Ireland	7.a.S, 7.g-h, j-k	0	0
Herring	Irish Sea	7.a.N	≤ 7309	-14
Cod	West of Scotland	6.a	0	0
Cod	Irish Sea	7.a	0	-100
Cod	western English Channel and southern Celtic Seas	7.e-k	0	0
Haddock	Irish Sea	7.a	≤ 2648	-13
Haddock	southern Celtic Seas and English Channel	7.b-k	≤ 11901	-25
Megrim	northern North Sea, West of Scotland	4.a, 6.a	≤ 7200	-2
Plaice	Irish Sea	7.a	≤ 2039	-30
Plaice	Bristol Channel, Celtic Seas	7.f-g	≤ 402	-77
Plaice	Celtic Sea South, southwest of Ireland	7.h-k	≤ 132	+20
Pollock	Celtic Seas and the English Channel	6-7	≤ 3360	0
Sole	Irish Sea	7.a	≤ 605	-23
Sole	Western English Channel	7.e	≤ 1394	-23
Sole	Bristol Channel, Celtic Sea	7.f-g	≤ 1338	+0.1
Sole	Celtic Sea South, southwest of Ireland	7.h-k	≤ 213	0
Whiting	West of Scotland	6.a	≤ 4155	1
Whiting	southern Celtic Seas and western English Channel	7.b-c, e-k	1715	-61

## The European Bottom Fisheries Alliance (EBFA) Faces Initial Challenge

The EBFA, drawn from fishing organisations in 14 EU countries, including Ireland, has encountered its first major challenge. The EU Regulation 2016/2336 controlling fishing for deep-sea stocks in the north-east Atlantic, both EU and international waters of the north-east Atlantic, poses such a challenge with a ban on all bottom fishing activities. Ninety four fishing areas in France, Spain, Portugal and Ireland would be banned from trawling, longlining, hooks etc., in all waters below 800m and below 400m where there is a possibility of Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems (VMEs). The *Nephrops* fishery in the Porcupine area could fall into this category which would have disastrous consequences for the Irish whitefish sector.

During the vote by the Committee on Fisheries and Agriculture, many Member States, including Ireland and several other countries not directly affected by this implementing Act, decided to abstain in protest against the lack of proper consultation in the process and the weakness of the impact assessments which accompanied this potential decision. The Committee's vote resulted in the absence of a qualified majority in favour or against the

text which rarely occurs in European legislative procedures. Now, the Commission must decide unilaterally on the fate of this implementing Act but the EBFA feels the Commission are unlikely to force it through under the circumstances.

The Commission disregarded the possibility of including areas where the existence of VMEs is already mapped and could be avoided. Existing scientific data is not being considered even though the science comes from an EU-funded project that aimed to better protect biodiversity (LIFE programme) and was carried out in co-operation with and the participation of stakeholders, including the fishing fleets. Additionally, the implementing Act will introduce buffer zones that triple the surface of the closed areas where mapped VMEs are located but not necessarily requiring such protection. Where VMEs are identified, trawling will be banned below 400m which poses a likely and serious threat to Ireland's very valuable *Nephrops* fishery in the Porcupine area.

Previously, ICES had been asked to provide scientific advice regarding the exploitation of these deep-sea habitats which was delivered in the form of four possible scenarios. Out of those

scenarios proposed by ICES, the Commission chose the most restrictive. In addition, ICES identified the outdated mapping capability used in the scientific advice which can over-estimate the proportion of the seabed where both fishing occurs and VMEs are present, but the Commission was prepared to over-ride such advice and continue to shut down entire fishing areas even if VMEs have never been recorded or only exist in a fraction of those deep-sea areas, with disastrous consequences for both fishers and food security.

Other fishing gears, such as long-liners or hooks, whose impacts, environmental or socio-economic, were not studied, will also be disproportionately affected by the closures. These fishing vessels will be forced to move from their traditional fishing grounds to other areas where their target species may not occur and the displacement effect is unknown but is unlikely to be positive and in some cases estimated to create a 75 per cent loss compared to their current operations. Ironically, while traditional fisheries may be closed, deep sea mining in these same areas seems to carry on unhindered.

# Editorial



by Sean O'Donoghue

CHIEF EXECUTIVE, KFO



The sharp rise in fuel costs as a result of the Russia-Ukraine conflict has created difficulties at every level of world-wide economies and this is very evident for European fishing businesses. Fishing and the downstream supply chain is still highly dependent on fossil fuels and the combined additional costs at every level have had a sharp and serious impact on all sectors from catching to retail sales. At European level, individual countries have reacted with a number of support measures which basically support the additional cost of fuel for fishing vessels. In Ireland the industry representative bodies have combined to demand that the Minister for the Marine, Charlie McConalogue, TD, introduces a national scheme immediately utilising the unused funds in the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (see article page one.)

On a related matter, the World Trade Organisation (WTO) has been assessing the impact of fuel subsidies on global fishing industries. In 2017 it was agreed that the WTO would adopt an

agreement to prohibit fisheries subsidies which could contribute to overcapacity, overfishing and, in particular, illegal unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. Loss of any subsidies at this time would be a very serious, and potentially lethal, blow to an industry already suffering from unsustainable fuel prices. Thus, the recent decision of the WTO not to remove the fuel subsidy is welcome. Instead, the agreement defines those areas where subsidies would be prohibited will only apply to specific situations, such as overfished stocks.

The "new approach" recently announced by Killybegs Fishermens Organisation, together with our colleagues Sinbad Marine Services and the offshore developer Hexicon AB, marks the launch of an innovative plan to develop Floating Offshore Renewable Energy

(pages one-two.) This project is a ground-breaking scheme founded on basic and important principles. We are concentrating on offshore wind projects and a key requirement will be to ensure minimal impact on existing biodiversity including our very important fish stocks. We are also committed to protecting access to existing fishing grounds and envisage significant benefit to the local community and all levels of the seafood sector. The Killybegs area is already a hub of marine-based expertise which will be enhanced by the project being planned in both short- and long-term time scales.

On June 30, ICES released the demersal catch advice for some of the Celtic Sea, West of Scotland, Irish Sea and North Sea stocks for 2023. Available fishing opportunities for virtually every area and species have been reduced and this advice paints a very poor outlook for the whitefish fleet. The entire list is available with some additional comment from Dr Ed Farrell (page three,) who also comments on the good news regarding the reinstatement of catch advice for the Northwest Herring. While the 2023 advice is only 1,892 tonnes, it is a step in the right direction and justifies the lengthy genetic studies driven by the industry itself which underlies this achievement. This outcome is a good starting point for re-establishing the fishery and will enable cautious and sustainable expansion over the coming years for both this stock and many other mixed stocks.

The KFO AGM was held on June 22, 2022. The usual procedures, such as delivery of Financial Reports were observed. After the AGM the Board of Directors met to elect a Chairman and co-opt Directors to the Board. The new Board of Directors is: Ciaran Doherty (Chair); Pete McBride (Vice-Chairman); Cathal Boyle; Cyril Harkin; Pauric Conneely; Tony Byrne; Eamon McGuinness; Jens Bach; Michael Callaghan; Marc Gallagher.

## Important Dates July - September 2022

DATE	MEETINGS	VENUE
Jul 6	Industry meeting with Minister McConalogue	Virtual (Dublin)
Jul 7	MAC ExCom	Virtual
Jul 8	Industry Fisheries Science Research Partnership (IFSRP)	Galway
Jul 12 - 13	PelAC WG 1,2 ExCom	The Hague
Jul 18	Fisheries Council	Brussels
Jul 20	ORE/Seafood Inaugural Meeting	Dublin
Jul 26 (AM)	MSP Advisory Group,	Dublin
Jul 26 (PM)	OREDP Advisory Group II	Virtual
Aug 24 - 30	WG WIDE	Copenhagen
Sept 5 - 9	STECF Marketing Standards and Sustainability Criteria	Virtual
Sept 8 - 9	EAPO AGM	Gottenburg
Sept 13 - 14	NWWAC WGs	Virtual
Sept 13 - 16	ADGWIDE	Virtual
Sept 19 - 20	MAC WGs	Virtual
Sept 26 - 28	ICFA	Rome
Sept 26	Fisheries Council	Brussels
Sept 28	NWWAC General Assembly, ExCom	Virtual
Sept 29	Pelagic AC FG on Herring 6a, 7 bc	Virtual
Sept 30	ICES Advice on Widely Distributed Stocks (Pelagic)	Copenhagen

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