



ICES Advice Confirms Large Stock of Mackerel and Blue Whiting

At the end of September ICES issued advice on a number of pelagic stocks, which are of major interest to the Irish industry. The advice for herring stocks around Ireland was issued at the end of June. The headline advice is negative compared to the previous year's advice, but this masks the fact that some of this advice, particularly as regards mackerel and blue whiting, is based on management plans that are no longer fit for purpose.

Mackerel: ICES headline advice is based on a defunct 2008 management plan that the catch in 2015 should be between 831,000 tonnes and 906,000 tonnes. However, since 2009, there has been no international agreement on TAC. In May 2014, ICES issued revised mackerel advice for this year which totally changed their perception of the stock by doubling of the stock size to about 4.8 million tonnes. Furthermore, ICES recommended that the 2008 management plan should be reviewed and possibly revised to reflect the new perception of the stock and the revised precautionary reference points. Unfortunately, the Coastal States have not yet done this, hence the ICES advice for 2015 is still based on the 2008 management plan. ICES also gives advice on the new fishing mortality (F_{msy}) of 0.25 which equates to a TAC for 2015 of 1,017,000 tonnes and confirms its advice of May this year in relation to the very large mackerel stock size.

Blue whiting: Similar to mackerel, ICES advises on a not-fit-for-purpose 2008 management plan agreed by Norway, the EU, the Faroe Islands, and Iceland that landings in 2015 should be no more than 839,886 tonnes. ICES last year revised the fishing mortality reference point for blue whiting to 0.3 (F_{msy}). Using this fishing mortality rather than 0.18 of the 2008 management plan, equates to a TAC for 2015 of 1,326,000 tonnes. The advice highlights that the spawning stock biomass has almost doubled from 2010 (2.9 million tonnes)

to 2014 (5.5 million tonnes) and is well above the precautionary level (2.25 million tonnes).

Western horse mackerel: ICES advises on the basis of the MSY approach that landings in 2015 should be no more than 99,304 tonnes, which constitutes a 10 per cent decrease on 2014 advice. Discards are considered negligible. In 2007, a management plan based on the triennial egg survey was proposed by the PAC (Pelagic Advisory Council) but is not used at present to set the EU TAC. ICES evaluated the management plan most recently in 2013, and it was concluded not to be in accordance with the precautionary approach. A revised management plan is currently under development.

North Sea horse mackerel: ICES advises a significant reduction in catch corresponding to catches in 2015 of less than 15,200 tonnes. This would be a decrease of 40 per cent compared to 2014. Discards are known to take place but cannot be quantified; therefore total catches cannot be calculated. ICES suggests that managers consider a two-to-three year initial phase with significantly reduced catches, which in this advice relates only to the first year. During the initial phase, ICES would aim at a continual improvement of the assessment, evaluate reference points, and develop a better understanding of the origin of fish caught in Division VIId. Following this a new range of HCRs might be explored, looking at long-term management considerations.

Boarfish: ICES advises on the basis of a data-limited stock approach that catches in 2015 should be no more than 53,296 tonnes. This advice method uses a comparison of the two most recent survey index values with the three preceding values, combined with recent catch or landings data. ICES decided that the assessment method it had adopted for the first time last year was no longer appropriate due to problems with the model. This in turn led to giving advice on the basis of a data-limited stock. It considers this to be an interim measure prior to development of an age-based assessment. A management plan has been proposed by the PAC but has not yet been evaluated by ICES and will now have to be revised in light of the rejection of the production model. Prior to 2010, commercial sampling effort was poor, with sampling conducted by only a small number of Irish and Danish vessels. Since 2010 sampling has been considered adequate, although boarfish is not currently included under the EU Data Collection Framework.

Atlanto-Scandian herring: ICES advises on the basis of the management plan of EU, Faroe Islands, Iceland, Norway and Russia that landings in 2015 should be no more than 283,013 tonnes. Minor discards are known to take place, but cannot be quantified accurately; the proportion of discards in the total catches are considered negligible. This is a 32 per cent decrease on the TAC for 2014. The stock is declining. Since 1998 five large year classes have been produced (1998, 1999, 2002, 2003, and 2004). However, available information indicates that year classes born between 2005 and 2012 have been small. Fishing mortality in 2013 was above the management plan target F, following the trend from previous years.

International Pressures Create Problems for Irish Exports

The market for fisheries products, and mackerel in particular, has received two severe blows this year. In January, Nigeria's Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development announced a gradual embargo on fish products, particularly frozen small pelagics, aiming towards an annual reduction of 25 per cent year-on-year in an effort to promote Nigerian fish production, principally aquaculture. Already prices for mackerel, a staple foodstuff, have soared on the domestic Nigerian market and it is highly unlikely that domestic production can replace imports, at least in the short term, which amounts to about 780,000 tonnes annually. This embargo may not be enforced quite as severely as first feared.

The situation which has developed closer to home as a result of the tit-for-tat sanctions war between western countries, in particular the EU, and Russia, could have more serious implications. On August 7, Russia announced that it was to ban imports of certain fisheries products from the EU. Russia is the EU's 6th export market for fisheries products. In 2013, EU exports of fisheries products to Russia represented five per cent, or €199m, of total EU fisheries exports. Ireland exported more than €20m worth of fish products to Russia last year and had already exported €19 million this year prior to the ban.

The European Commission has already introduced emergency measures to combat the effects of sanctions on the food and agriculture industries but has not yet taken similar action for the fishing industry. The EU pelagic industry made a number of recommendations to the Commission and the Member States in August urging immediate action. These included the setting up of a taskforce to address the situation in fisheries, to carry out an urgent review of the current rules and amount of funding available for storage aid, with a view to the establishment of an emergency fund and a temporary increase in quota flexibility rules to allow Member States hold over more fishing quota until the following year, allowing time for improvement in the market. At the Fisheries Council in early September, Minister Simon Conway called for urgent action by the Commission on these recommendations. Commissioner Damanaki indicated that the European Commission would support financial aid by means of the EMFF to those countries affected by the Russian ban. This would include financial aid for storage and flexibility regarding carrying over up to ten per cent of quota to the following year. Unfortunately these announcements have not yet come to fruition.

Pelagic Weighing Dispute Resolved

The dispute concerning the weighing of pelagic fish has been resolved following protracted negotiations between the Federation of Irish Fishermen (FIF), the Irish Fish Processors and Exporters Association (IFPEA) and the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority (SFPA). This has come as a great relief to all concerned as further contention would have had serious implications for industry with potential loss of millions of Euros and hundreds of jobs in the pelagic fishing and processing sectors. After reaching a compromise with the SFPA, permits were issued to the vast majority of the processing plants as soon as agreement was reached.

Initially, the SFPA is proposing the majority of the landings will go over the weighbridge without any de-watering taking place however, most importantly, this inaccurate weight will not be used as the final logbook figure. The figure to be used will be accurate

figures from the permitted plants using a belt-weighing flow system. The purpose of initial weighing over the weighbridge is to enable the SFPA to establish a statistical tolerance figure to allow for water in the fish in the tankers. This figure will be used in the future for landings to non-permitted plants or landings transported outside of Ireland and also to cross check the factory weights. In all but exceptional circumstances, all weighing for the purpose of logbook recording, will take place in processing plants that have permits.

Providing all goes according to plan over the initial two-month period, future weighing will take place as before, in permitted factories. There will still be a requirement to carry out some weighing at the point of landing but as in the initial period the weight from the weighbridge will not be used in the logbook declarations.

EU "Prohibition on Driftnet Fisheries"

The European Commission has introduced a proposal for a Regulation which would prohibit all driftnet fisheries. This has been greeted with a mixture of disbelief and outrage, particularly among the inshore fishermen who felt there was finally some appreciation of the value of the artisanal-scale fisheries which are very often executed by driftnet. It also appears to disregard the move, promoted by the reformed CFP, to regionalisation since this ban would apply throughout the EU irrespective of where, or if, there is a sustainability problem. The timing of this proposal is also difficult to understand since the EU Commission has already commissioned a major

report on drift netting but it has not been published to date.

Inshore fishermen in Ireland, particularly in Atlantic coastal communities, are already very aware of the impact of such a ban since the prohibition of drifting for salmon came into force in 2006. Plans to maintain maritime communities and preserve a unique way of life in islands and peripheral areas are severely threatened by this legislation and a very determined effort is underway by the entire fishing industry, not only in Ireland but the entire EU, to ensure this regulation does not come into law in its current form.

BIM's Gear Technology Work Concentrates on the Landing Obligation

This year has been particularly busy for BIM's gear technology section. The Landings Obligation has focussed the minds of industry and Government agencies alike, and there is strong demand for technical solutions to reduce the economic impacts of changing legal requirements. The first major trial of the year compared quad- and twin-rig trawls in the Celtic Sea *nephrops* fishery. This project aimed to assess potential benefits of the quad-rig, including increased catch rates of *nephrops*, reduced by-catch of species such as cod and examine any other issues arising. Conducted onboard the *MFV Celtic Chieftain* at the Smalls in April, the trial revealed significant reductions of cod by 61 per cent, haddock by 38 per cent and an increase in *nephrops* by 54 per cent in the quad compared to the twin-rig. Higher proportions of juvenile cod and *nephrops* were also observed in the quad-rig. In summary, the quad-rig has major potential benefits in terms of reducing overall whitefish catches thereby helping to meet the requirements of the Landings Obligation. However, retention of increased proportions of smaller prawns does raise concerns regarding the long-term sustainability of the *nephrops* fishery. In consultation with the industry, the MI and the Department, BIM aims to conduct further trial(s) before year end to test devices such as sorting grids and square mesh cod-ends to address this issue.

Further sea trials completed to date include an assessment of a 300 mm square mesh panel (SMP) used in *nephrops* trawls to reduce bycatch of cod and other whitefish species. Considered more straightforward to use than the more finicky SELTRA box panel, the 300mm SMP is considered to be relatively easy to use by industry, and preliminary

results from this work look promising. BIM also carried out two trials in the Irish and Celtic Seas examining the selectivity of *nephrops* trawls using four different diamond mesh sizes between 70 and 100 mm. This work is key to understanding the potential implications of changes in mesh size on the target species as well as potential impacts on bycatch of juvenile fish and will also feed into the upcoming trial on improved selectivity devices in the *nephrops* fishery. Reports on all of these completed trials will be available before year end.

In terms of future work, BIM is about to conduct a selectivity trial in the mixed demersal fishery in the Celtic Sea. This work will address some knowledge gaps in this area. Crucially, this work will also permit an assessment of the economic impacts of the impending Landings Obligation, helping to frame solutions to potential problems in this fishery. A dedicated project to explore the impacts of the Landings Obligation is also due to commence the first week in October. BIM has commissioned the *MFV Foyle Warrior* from Greencastle and the *MFV Arkh Angell* from Clogherhead to simulate the full introduction of the Landings Obligation. Collaborating with the MI, the project has been split into two phases. In Phase One key challenges such as requirements to land and legally dispose of under-sized fish of particular species, occurrence of choke species and additional costs associated with handling, landing and disposal of non-marketable fish will be examined. Potential technical and tactical solutions to the problems identified in Phase One will be assessed in a second phase. Arising from the results of this project, the economic impacts on the fisheries in question will be thoroughly investigated by BIM.



Comparing results from quad- and twin-rig trawls

Clawing Brown Crab at Sea Must be Eradicated

Clawing brown crab at sea and landing crab claws while discarding the remainder of the crab has been a major problem this past season. The myth that de-clawed crab grow back their claws needs to be dispelled – de-clawed crab die! The practice has been particularly prevalent off the Donegal coast where trawlers and other crab fishermen are re-catching de-clawed crab at an unprecedented rate. There has been a huge effort put into eradicating this practice and the majority of crab fishermen do not condone it but agree it is a serious problem for the industry on a number of fronts:

- Poor quality product reaches the market which has a negative financial effect on those who are landing the best possible product;
- There are serious health implications since these claws may be held in unsanitary conditions for days before reaching a processing plant;
- There are potential disease threats for the brown crab population as this practice is known to spread *Haematodinium* infection;
- BIM and the industry have worked very hard and at considerable financial cost to engage crab fishermen in the Responsibly Sourced Standard; de-clawing crab is in direct contravention of the Standard and could undermine the Standard for all those trying to build up an international reputation and markets outside Ireland;
- The ACRUNET project, which is largely driven by the Irish brown crab partners, has used the BIM RSS as a template for its other European partners; the project aims to develop a transnational standard and will be in considerable jeopardy if this practice of de-clawing at sea is not stamped out;
- It is widely accepted that de-clawing is a cover for landing both under-size and poor quality so-called “white crab;” and
- The permitted weight of detached crab claws retained on board or landed by a fishing vessel

must not exceed one per cent of total weight of crab retained or landed according to Council Regulation (EC) No 724/2001 i.e. there is a legal obligation not to deliberately de-claw crab at sea.

Tackling this issue is not easy and the problem does not rest entirely with the catching sector. There would be no landings of brown crab claws if there was no market for them and there must be a concerted effort by all involved, including the SFFPA, to eradicate this very damaging practice. The majority of responsible, professional crab fishermen fully support efforts to eliminate this serious threat to their industry.



Clawed crab being re-caught.

New Management Plan Being Developed For Western Horse Mackerel

Western horse mackerel is a very important fishery for the major pelagic fleets in Europe. Since the development of the fisheries for this species in the early 1990s Ireland has been intimately involved with both the assessment and management of the resource. The stock itself is widely distributed from the Iberian coast to the North of Scotland, and even migrates into the northern North Sea in the summer. Abundance wise the western horse mackerel has exhibited an unusual dynamic over the 30 odd years for which we have data. That dynamic is characterised by individual high recruitment events, followed by long periods with relatively little productivity. This means that the population goes through cycles of rapid increases followed by slow declines in spawning stock biomasses. Unlike most stocks however lower biomasses in horse mackerel is not associated with increased risks of poor productivity, in fact quite the opposite, it is at the lower biomasses that the stock has exhibited the strong pulses of recruitment. However it is likely that the strong recruitments are chance events driven more by external factors affecting the early life stages of the fish, than by some factor related to the size of the spawning biomass.

A management plan for western horse mackerel was

developed by the pelagic fishing industry working with scientists in 2006-2007 and subsequently adopted by the Pelagic Regional Advisory Council. This management plan was used to set the TAC on the stock from 2008-2010. However, a recent evaluation by ICES has recommended that the plan be re-worked as the standards by which such plans are considered adequately evaluated has developed since the original work was done. This work is being done by the PAC, again in conjunction with some scientists from Ireland, UK and the Netherlands. It is too early to see the completed result from this work yet, but what is known is that the changes to the harvest rule (HCR) in the plan will likely have to include a safety rule to reduce exploitation rates if the biomass falls below the range observed in the past. Given the current relatively low SSB of the western horse mackerel stock, unless a strong recruitment event occurs soon, this is likely to mean continued decreasing TACs in the coming years. On the upside however, the new management plan is likely to ensure some form of stability in the yields over time. The PAC further discussed these developments with the scientists at its meeting in The Hague on October 1, and it is hoped to have the plan developed and ready for review early in the New Year.

Regulation to Address Landings Obligation Unlikely To Be In Place for New Year

The so-called “Omnibus Regulation” is a proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and the Council to bring the current EU fisheries technical conservation and control rules into alignment with the landing obligation, usually referred to as the “discards ban,” which was agreed under the reformed Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). The landing obligation will come into effect initially for the pelagic and migratory species fisheries on January 1, 2015 and for demersal fisheries from the beginning of 2016.

This proposed “quick-fix” Regulation is intended as an interim measure to facilitate the implementation of the landings obligation. The existing fisheries management rules, for example, catch composition specifications, may require actions taken which are, in effect, discarding fish which would be in direct contravention of the landing obligation; under the new proposal all catch percentages which exceed specified limits would be landed and counted against quota. The bulk of the changes proposed relate to Council Regulation (EC) No 850/98, usually referred to as the Technical Conservation Measures Regulation. A crucial aspect of the Omnibus Regulation is the requirement that both the Council and the European Parliament agreed on it by before the end of 2014; at this point in time, it appears very unlikely that this will happen.

In addition to the Omnibus Regulation, there is a facility within the CFP to adopt a regional approach to resolve the regulatory anomalies that will arise through the implementation of the landings obligation. This would involve the relevant Member States coming to agreement based on three groupings: the North Sea (Scheveningen) Group, the Western Waters Group and the Southern Waters Group. The Pelagic Advisory Council (PAC) produced a very comprehensive industry-based plan, which would have covered all the widely-ranging species in all the areas they are fished. Unfortunately, this proposal has been largely ignored which will result in a most unsatisfactory situation where different rules will be applied to the same stock in different regions. The industry faces a mess on January 1, 2015 that is difficult to contemplate.

Editorial

by Sean O'Donoghue

CHIEF EXECUTIVE, KFO



The ICES scientific advice for widely distributed stocks was issued at the end of September (see article page one.) The headline scientific advice for all of the pelagic species of interest to Ireland is negative, but this is not the true picture particularly for mackerel and blue whiting.

The mackerel and blue whiting advice is based on 2008 management plans, which are no longer fit for purpose. ICES uses a hierarchy for giving its advice which requires it to give advice in the first instance on agreed management plans unless the plan has been objected to by one of the parties. In the case of mackerel and blue whiting, the Coastal States did not object to the defunct management plans even though they are working on new fit-for-purpose management plans which are not yet completed. In the absence of management plans, ICES gives advice on maximum sustainable yield. If this was used in the headline advice, rather than given in the body of the text, you get a totally different picture.

In the case of mackerel, ICES issued revised mackerel advice in May 2014 for this year, which totally changed their perception of the stock by doubling of the stock size to about 4.8 million tonnes. This very large stock has been confirmed in the recent advice. This is good news for Ireland's number one economic fishery and all the indications are pointing towards a very large stock over the

next number of years.

Similar to mackerel, ICES advice highlights in the body of the text, that the spawning stock biomass has almost doubled from 2010 (2.9 million tonnes) to 2014 (5.5 million tonnes) and is well above the precautionary level (2.25 million tonnes).

It is disappointing that ICES has decided to reject the assessment methodology for boarfish it had adopted for the first time this year due to problems with the model. In light of this rejection the advice is based on a data limited stock approach, hence a direct comparison with the advice this year is not valid. The ICES view is that it was an error on its behalf to have used the production model for its advice this year. I am however confident that in conjunction with the scientists that we will get a new age-based assessment method in place. I am also very encouraged with the news from the fishing grounds last week from one of the main boarfish fishermen that he has encountered the largest shoals of boarfish he has seen in three years.

The very contentious issue of weighing pelagic fish has been hanging over the pelagic industry for several months (see page two) but, thankfully, common sense has prevailed. We have reached a compromise with the Sea Fisheries Protection

Authority (SFPA) and weighing will take place on the accurate flow belt weighing system in the permitted fish processing plants. The alternative, which was totally unacceptable to the industry, would have been the use of weighbridges resulting in weighing water as fish, with consequent over-estimates of quota utilisation or compromised fish quality if the water was drained from the tankers. We will continue to liaise with the SFPA to ensure any problems are resolved quickly and fairly.

As I predicted when the Common Fisheries Policy negotiations were taking place, the time-scale was, and is, extremely short to deal with the many conflicting rules which will create chaos when the landing obligation is enforced (see page three.) The Commission has attempted to bring some order to the situation by proposing an Omnibus Regulation to deal with the contradictions that will arise when one regulation says a fish must be landed and another says it is breaking the law to land it. However, there is very little prospect that both the Council and the European Parliament will agree this regulation before the end of 2014, so on January 1, 2015 there will be two opposing sets of rules for the European fishing industry. It should make for some interesting legal debates.

Following an extraordinary year in 2013 and the start of 2014 for the pelagic industry, particularly mackerel, we now have to contend with enormous upheaval in the international marketplace (see page two.) In January, Nigeria announced a 25 per cent reduction of imports of fish products year-on-year up to 2016; in 2013, Ireland exported mackerel and horse mackerel worth €40 million to Nigeria so this substantial business could be in jeopardy. It may not be possible for Nigeria to make up the shortfall in such a short time in which case the fall-out may not be so severe. However, closer to home, the sanctions imposed by Russia may pose a greater problem. I urge Minister Coveney to persist in his efforts to put a range of measures in place without delay to try to alleviate the affects of this embargo.

I am disappointed that one of the first steps taken by the new President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, is to put the Directorates-General for Environment and Maritime Affairs and Fisheries under the one Commissioner Karmenu Vella, the Tourism Minister under the Maltese Labour Party government "to reflect the twin logic of the Blue and Green Growth" agendas. There are bound to be major areas of conflict within this new portfolio. The jury is definitely out on Commissioner Vella until we see how he juggles the opposing demands of DG MARE and DG ENVI but we wish him well.

Killybegs Fishermen's Organisation has recently updated its website. Please view and feel free to send us your feedback, news items and suggestions on www.kfo.ie.

Important Dates October - December 2014

DATE	MEETINGS	VENUE
1 Oct.	PAC WG1 & WG2	Hague
2 Oct.	PAC General Assembly & Executive Committee	Hague
2-3 Oct.	EAPO AGM	Westport, Co. Mayo
8 Oct	Discard Implementation Group Meeting	Dublin
9 Oct	Markets Advisory Council Inaugural Meeting	Brussels
13-14 Oct	Fisheries Council	Luxembourg
13-17 Oct	Coastal States Blue Whiting & Atlanto-Scandia Herring	London
20-24 Oct	Coastal States Mackerel	London
31 Oct	Whitefish Quota Management meeting	Dublin
End Oct	Possible Commission Proposals TACs & Quotas 2015	Brussels
4 Nov	LDAC	Brussels
10-14 Nov	NEAFC AGM	London
10-11 Nov	Fisheries Council	Brussels
17-21 Nov	EU/Norway Bilateral first round	Bergen
25-26 Nov	Blue Whiting Assessment	Copenhagen
1-5 Dec	EU/Norway Bilateral second round	Clonakilty, Co. Cork
8-9 Dec	EU/Faroes Bilateral	Brussels
15-16 Dec	Fisheries Council	Brussels

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