



SeaFest 2017 – Ireland's Maritime Showcase



Conor Mowlds, Head of National Maritime College of Ireland, NMCI, presents the Marine Industry Leader 2017 Award to Sean O'Donoghue (right).

A carnival, a seafood conference, an appraisal of Ireland's place on the global maritime industry stage and the acknowledgement of the contributions made by the leaders of marine endeavour, added up to SeaFest 2017.

Held in Galway from June 29 to July 2, this wonderful festival of the sea, now in its fourth year, was a resounding success. The underlying theme was sustainability, described as "Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." Sustainability has become a major driver in marine development with an expectation of substantial dividends for both current and future generations.

SeaFest kicked-off with the Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM) National Seafood Conference entitled "Winning in a Changing Environment." The BIM strategy is built around four pillars - skills, innovation, sustainability, and competitiveness - to enable the Irish seafood industry attain all the objectives identified in Foodwise 2025. The well-designed format of expert speakers, discussion sessions and industry representatives under the experienced guidance of entrepreneurial guru Gavin Duffy kept the audience engaged and, better still, entertained. The well-paced sessions were informative and thought-provoking and avoided the pitfall of only appealing to a narrow sector at any one time.

The BIM conference was preceded by a special Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine Pre-Conference Brexit Discussion which has been dealt with in greater detail in our article "DAFM Hosts BREXIT Meeting at SeaFest" (see right.)

The BIM Conference was followed by the annual Marine Industry Awards gala ceremony which recognises and celebrates the most original and innovative individuals and companies that

demonstrate excellence in the Irish maritime and marine industry. As expected, awards went to those who met and surpassed the criteria so the fishing industry, and in particular Killybegs Fishermen's Organisation, was hugely delighted when Sean O'Donoghue was declared Marine Industry Leader of 2017. The award was sponsored by the National Maritime College of Ireland in recognition of Sean's outstanding contribution to the growth of the marine industry in Ireland, (see photo above.)

The prestigious Bailey Allen Hall in the grounds of The National University of Ireland, Galway was the setting for the "Harnessing Our Ocean Wealth" (HOOW) annual review. HOOW originated in 2012 when the Inter-Departmental Marine Coordination Group published an integrated plan for Ireland with the primary goal of achieving a thriving maritime economy and convenes this review-style meeting each year to measure progress.

This year the event was concerned with Ireland's place in the global maritime environment with an overarching theme "Rethinking boundaries and innovation for a sustainable marine economy." The themes innovation, smarter and better, and the balance between threat and opportunity posed by the rapid changes in our oceans were explored and analysed by the speakers and panelists from a wide range of backgrounds and nationalities. Ireland is now midway through the original HOOW programme and judging from the extensive reports on a huge range of maritime projects covering engineering, shipping, port development, fisheries, biology and seafood, is well on schedule to reach its goals.

DAFM Hosts BREXIT Meeting at SeaFest

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) facilitated a meeting to discuss the current position regarding Brexit and its effects on Irish fishing and seafood production in advance of the BIM National Seafood Conference in Galway on June 29. The meeting was presided over by Minister Michael Creed TD and included representatives Niels Wichmann, Danish Producer Organisation and Chairman of the North Sea Advisory Council; Emiel Brouckaert, Redercentrale (Belgium) and Secretary-General of EAPO; Sean O'Donoghue, KFO; Lorcan O'Ceinneide, IFPEA; Patrick Murphy, ISWPO, and Hugo Boyle, ISEPO. The meeting moderator was Dr Cecil Beamish, DAFM.

This is the most recent of meetings which have been held since early this year to keep both industry and government informed and engaged in the task of keeping the potential impact of Brexit at the very top of everyone's agenda, particularly those in government. While there are 27 countries which will be affected to some extent or other when the UK leaves the European Union, only those European countries which share waters with the UK will suffer serious consequences on the fisheries front. Fishing industry organisations from nine of those countries, including KFO from Ireland, have united to form the European Fisheries Alliance (EUFA) (<http://fisheriesalliance.eu>) to represent the interests of fishing fleets who traditionally fish in waters from which they may soon be excluded. The founding members represent more than 18,000 fishermen and 3,500 vessels.

EUFA highlights the transboundary and interdependent nature of fishing activities in the North Sea, waters west of Scotland, the Irish Sea, the Celtic Sea as well as the Channel. For hundreds of years European and UK fishermen have shared fish stocks and fishing grounds. Together they have harvested some 100 shared stocks through relationships grounded in reciprocity, understanding and reasoned discussion. These arrangements were in place long before the concept of a 200-mile Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and included rational management of shared fish stocks. In EUFA's opinion the rejection of the CFP by the UK does not remove its obligations under far more long-standing commitments.

The fishing representatives at the SeaFest meeting reiterated the EUFA viewpoint. Led by Minister Creed, there was a call for all those countries affected to put aside their individual national interests and unite to assure a workable solution post-Brexit. The usual manoeuvring which would normally accompany the run in to a revised CFP, due to begin in the near future, needed to be parked-up on this occasion until the outcome of the negotiations were apparent. Sean O'Donoghue said the negotiating priorities must include a firm link between access, share of the quota and overall trade, there must be a transitional arrangement in place by March 2019 to avoid a "cliff-fall" for all sectors and a united front must be maintained between industry, government bodies and EUFA. Minister Creed welcomed the formation of the EUFA industry group and felt it would be very helpful in upcoming negotiations and he, too, urged all stakeholders to collectively focus on access, quotas and trade.

Eventful Times for Brown Crab Industry

Brown crab stakeholders have had many challenges over the past decade and there does not appear to be any respite. However, it is not all bad news as there have been some positive developments so far this year, such as the resumption of live brown crab exports to China.

The Brown Crab Focus Group setup by the North Western Waters Advisory Council met earlier this year in Paris. The theme of the meeting was an overview of where the industry stands to assist stakeholders decision-making regarding future development. The key elements examined were the management measures, the market demands and where the focus needs to be to support a sustainable and economically viable industry.

Representatives from the producer countries UK, Ireland and France provided updates on their individual management strategies which vary considerably. This is not necessarily a problem if the end result ensures a sustainable, profitable industry for the future. The attending fishery scientists pointed out the difficulties caused by the disparity in the data coming from the individual countries and the need to harmonise data collection and its use. It was agreed the Focus Group has a valuable role in facilitating the coordination of such data and will pursue this through DG MARE and the ICES Crab Working Group.

Data collection for crustacean species is notoriously difficult, requiring detailed individual sampling and recording but the presentation from Dr Yves Reecht, Marine Institute, described an innovative use of historical data which could be used to extrapolate information not hitherto available. The delegates also heard how the market has been evolving from Bord Bia representative Finnian O'Luasa. Purchases of crab and crab products are now largely centred in the supermarket chains, and consumers are very environmentally aware. This has driven the industry towards certification both at fishery and product level.

The revised BIM Responsibly Sourced Standard is now being applied by many in the crab fleet with audits already carried out. Sustainability is not only about fish stocks; there is a growing emphasis on social responsibility, care of the crew and bio-diversity on shore as well as at sea. All candidates for certification under the RSS must sign up for a Fishery Improvement Plan (FIP) which assures consumers the fishery is being managed sustainably; without such assurances it is virtually impossible to access many valuable markets such as the United States and Canada.

The growth of Fishery Improvement Projects (FIPs) has become a global phenomenon; a number of species have been identified in Ireland which could benefit from FIPs including brown crab. Supported by BIM, several stakeholder meetings have been held and a brown crab FIP is now in place with a workplan for 2017. The success of the FIP model is driven by its commercial value; it provides fisheries which cannot meet the criteria for one of the major certification schemes, such as MSC, an alternative pathway to accreditation. In fisheries where top-down management poses problems a FIP can create options for a high degree of self-management and many brown crab stakeholders find this a very sensible solution to some of the issues they encounter currently.

ICES Advice for Demersal and Herring Stocks for 2018

The ICES Advice on demersal stocks and herring stocks in ICES Sub-areas VI and VII, which are of critical interest to Irish fishing fleets, was released on June 30. There will be further Advice later this year, such as the Advice on pelagic species at the end of September, Nephrops at end of October and an update on the current Advice in mid-November.

West of Scotland and Rockall Stocks (VIa and VIb)

The Advice for cod, whiting and herring in VIa continues to be zero; haddock in IV/VIa is increased (8 per cent) but shows a drop for VIb (-10 per cent). Megrim in the same areas is lower (-9 per cent) but there will be further Advice issued for VIb megrim in October when Advice for monkfish will also be available. Saithe remains unchanged compared with last year.

For 2018 ICES advises a zero TAC for Northwest herring and the development of a stock recovery plan; there has been a scientific monitoring TAC in place for the past two years and ICES recommends this monitoring TAC of 5,800 tonnes for the entire area be continued in 2018.

The industry, in conjunction with the Pelagic Advisory Council (PELAC), initiated a major genetic research programme in 2016 that aims to provide new stock separation information and has made significant progress on the sequencing and sequence analysis. A panel of high-graded markers is expected to be available by October 2017. In addition, the industry initiated an industry acoustic survey during 2016 which will be continued in 2017 to provide a minimum estimate of spawning stock size and to provide genetic and morphometric samples of the two separate spawning populations. As advised by ICES in both 2016 and 2017, the PELAC has developed and sent a draft rebuilding plan for herring in divisions VIa and VIIbc to the Commission with the request to submit it to STECF for evaluation at the July 2017 meeting. The PELAC is also requesting that a benchmark should take place as soon as possible and is hoping that this will happen in 2018 when the new genetic information on stock separation is available.

Celtic Sea (VIIb-k)

The ICES Advice for Celtic Sea demersal fisheries is being dealt with on the basis of a mixed fishery i.e. some species will reach quota limits more quickly than others and will restrict further fishing. While there has been a significant increase in the advised cod TAC (10 per cent) there are substantial reductions for haddock (-23 per cent) and whiting (-27 per cent). Plaice and sole advice indicates increases in Area VIIfg (26 and 7 per cent respectively) but reductions for remaining Area VII divisions. Reductions for megrim (-14 per cent) and hake (-13 per cent) are also recommended.

ICES has proposed a huge reduction in 2018 TAC for herring in the Celtic Sea from 14,500 tonnes to 5,445 tonnes (-62 per cent). The long-term management plan for this stock was drawn up by the Pelagic Advisory Council in 2011 and was deemed to be precautionary by ICES; however, the EU Commission has requested that ICES provide advice based on the MSY. The management plan advice has been used over the last number of years in setting the TAC and it is expected that this practise will continue for next year. The management plan advice for 2018 is 10,127 tonnes. ICES has formulated its current advice due to uncertainty regarding some data which may be unreliable, such as the acoustic survey, and increased activities in the Irish Sea which could impact on spawning. The Celtic Sea Herring Management Advisory Committee had already highlighted the unreliability of the data, such as the acoustic survey in this case.

Irish Sea (VIIa)

There is no change to the ICES Advice for zero TAC for sole and whiting in the Irish Sea but there is a welcome increase from zero to 695 tonnes for cod and a small increase of 8 per cent for haddock. An increase of 63 per cent for plaice is indicated.

Following a benchmark of the herring stock in the Irish Sea (North of 52°30'N) in 2017 the fishery assessment model was changed which in turn led to revised upwards of SSB (Spawning Stock Biomass) and downward revision of fishing mortality. Based on this data, ICES advises a large increased TAC of 7,016 tonnes in 2018 i.e. 70 per cent greater than 2017. This advice has negative implications for Celtic Sea herring in future years but not for next year.

Benchmark Assessment Makes Changes to NEA Mackerel Assessment

Andrew Campbell, Marine Institute, informs industry that the very important NEA Mackerel benchmark assessment for 2017 is now completed. Catch advice for mackerel is based upon a stock assessment which is carried out during the annual WGWIDE meeting at ICES. The details of the method used for this assessment are set during a process known as a benchmark assessment, typically every three to five years. During the benchmark process (which takes about six months) all of the input data, assessment and forecast methods, and stock reference points are reviewed.

Early in 2017, over 30 scientists met in ICES, Copenhagen to complete a benchmark of the NEA Mackerel stock assessment, a process which started in late 2016 with a data compilation meeting. During the benchmark a number of changes to the assessment (last benchmarked in 2014) were discussed. These changes covered a number of aspects of the assessment but were mainly associated with the

input data and how the assessment model uses that data.

During the 2014 benchmark, data from the trawl survey in the Nordic Seas was included in the assessment for the first time. In 2017, with three additional survey years available, it was possible to exclude some years when the survey coverage was poor and also to include

(Continued on page three.)

International 2017 Blue Whiting Acoustic Survey Shows Increase In Stock Size

In March the *RV Celtic Explorer* took part in the 2017 International Blue Whiting Acoustic Survey. This survey, the fourteenth in the time series, acoustically measures the size of the spawning stock of blue whiting (*Micromesistius poutassou*) in western waters and is conducted by vessels from Ireland, Faroes, Netherlands and Norway.

Area Coverage

The Celtic Explorer started the survey in the south Porcupine (51°30'N) on the 19 March, joined later by the Dutch (*RV Tridens*), Norwegian (*FV Kings Bay*) and Faroese (*RV Magnus Heinason*) vessels. Combined effort ensured almost continual synoptic coverage over 21 days from the south Porcupine northwards to the Faroe/Shetland Ridge including Rockall and offshore banks south of the Faroes. The survey covered over 6,105 nmi (nautical miles) of transects representing almost 135,085 nmi² of spatial coverage. The overall spatial coverage, sampling effort and timing were comparable to that of the 2016 survey.

The survey was designed so that each vessel worked in a northwards direction interlacing transects with the other vessels and so providing high resolution transect spacing. The weather this year was mixed however due to the coordination between the vessels the coverage was comprehensive and systematic.

Stock Distribution

Blue whiting were distributed along the shelf edge and extended into open water in the Rockall Trough area for up to 60 nmi. The highest density of blue whiting occurred in region from the northern Porcupine north to west of the Barra Head, consistent with last year (Figure 1). The age structure of the stock in proportions

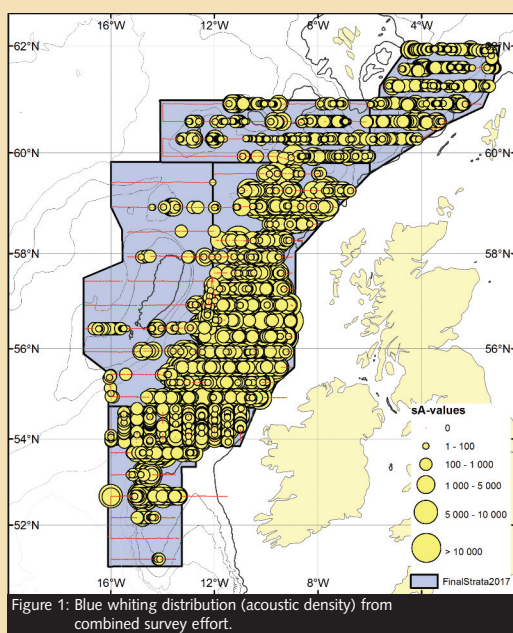


Figure 1: Blue whiting distribution (acoustic density) from combined survey effort.

as expected when considering the results from recent years. The large number of immature one year-old fish that were observed in 2016 (from the strong 2015 year class) have now fully recruited to the spawning stock as two year olds.

Stock Composition

Over 2,470 individual blue whiting were aged and over 5,250 individual length measurements were taken from the 46 trawl samples (Figure 2). Individuals ranged 1 to 13 years old with the stock biomass dominated by age classes 3, 4, and 5 years representing over 81% of the standing stock biomass.

The proportion of immature fish (1 year olds) in the 2017 estimate is significantly lower than in 2016 and this is most notable in the northern survey strata around the Faroes. The total number of immature fish was low overall and no immature fish were observed from trawl samples from the Rockall and north Porcupine strata.

Stock Size

The total stock biomass estimate of blue whiting for the 2017 survey is nine percent higher than in 2016. However, in 2016 the total biomass contained a higher proportion of immature fish. These fish have now recruited to the stock as active spawners and so increasing the biomass of the spawning stock.

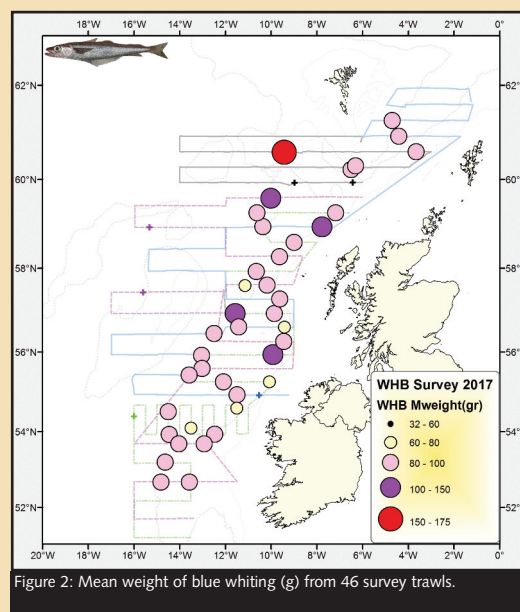


Figure 2: Mean weight of blue whiting (g) from 46 survey trawls.

Benchmark Assessment Makes Changes to NEA Mackerel Assessment (Continued)

information from a wider range of age classes than had previously been possible. This survey has shown indications of year effects, possibly as a result of varying weather conditions experienced year to year. Although the assessment model cannot explicitly take account of such effects, an assessment update was made to recognise that year effects are a feature of the survey.

Included for the first time in the assessment is the data from the RFID tagging programme which started in 2011 (and so was not long enough to be included during the 2014 benchmark). Although tagging has been taking place for many years, the change from steel to RFID tags meant that the data since 2011 has to be treated separately to the older information (which was first included in the 2014 benchmark of the assessment). The RFID tagging programme involves the annual tagging of some 40,000 mackerel and the scanning of the catch in factories to detect returns.

The other sources of data used in the assessment include the catch sampling information, a recruitment index calculated from groundfish surveys and the triennial egg survey which provides an index of SSB. The preliminary 2016 egg survey data was used and included in the benchmark with minor revisions to previous years. The 2016 egg survey revealed a change in the distribution and timing of spawning. Additional surveys are being undertaken to help plan next MEGS survey in 2019.

Updated values for some reference points were calculated using the benchmark assessment. The remaining points will be revised during an upcoming evaluation of a long term management plan for the stock. Following on from this, the updated assessment (along with the latest catch and survey data) will be run at WGWIDE in September and will form the basis for the 2018 advice.

Editorial

by Sean O'Donoghue

CHIEF EXECUTIVE, KFO



The Killybegs Fishermen's Organisation is facing one of the most critical periods in its existence. There are two major issues facing us. One is the intention of the United Kingdom to leave the European Union, as we now refer to it, Brexit, and the second is the completely inappropriate review of mackerel allocations.

Since triggering Article 50 on March 29, which initiated the exit process of the UK from the EU, there has not been significant action on either side of the process but the scenario changed dramatically with the announcement on July 2 that the UK intended withdrawing from the 1964 London Convention which covers fisheries access agreements in the six- to twelve-miles zones. It was always going to happen as the London Convention access agreements would still stand even after the UK had left the EU unless the UK gave notification to withdraw from the Convention. A two-year notification period is required under the Convention to withdraw. The manner and timing of the announcement has laid down a marker as to how the Brexit fisheries negotiations will proceed. There is no doubt now that the UK will aim for a "hard" Brexit where fisheries is concerned and while this may well be a populist move it is being done in full knowledge of the consequences. The *Voisinage* agreement covering access arrangements between Northern Ireland and Ireland in the zero- to six-miles zone and provided for under article 9.2 of the London Convention, is currently going through our legislative process under the Sea-Fisheries



(Amendment) Bill 2017, and should be stopped in light of the withdrawal notice.

The European Fisheries Alliance (EUFA) is a coalition of European fishing fleets directly impacted by Brexit namely from countries in Ireland, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain and Sweden. The EUFA have come together to ensure our governments keep fishing at the top of their negotiating agenda. EUFA has also agreed to "park" their issues with the CFP, particularly relative stability, until after the Brexit negotiations. An essential strategy will be to ensure that access to UK waters is maintained, continued share of the quota in those waters, and critically that the overall trade arrangements are linked together throughout the negotiations. The UK exports 74 per cent of its seafood to the EU; it cannot replace that market overnight and this in conjunction with wider trade arrangements are key leverages to ensure continued access to the waters we depend on for our most valuable species, mackerel and nephrops, and to maintain our quota share in UK waters.

The mackerel allocation review has been rumbling on now for more than six months and Minister Creed should put an end to this farce without delay. There was no factual basis for starting it in

the first place. It is incredible the amount of fictional information and rewriting of history the ISWFPO have embarked on to try and justify their flawed proposal which has no factual basis whatsoever. The KFO has very comprehensively dealt with this misinformation in its submissions to the consultation process and at the recent Joint Oireachtas Committee on Agriculture, Food and the Marine. With the unprecedented and particularly demanding challenges presented by Brexit, it's incredible this ludicrous review is playing out in tandem with this issue causing unnecessary distraction as well as wasting precious resources and time.

It is now more than a year since the European Commission proposed a revamp of the technical measures legislation, but in May this year the Council reached agreement on the format of a proposal for new rules on conservation of fishery resources and protection of marine ecosystems. The agreement is far from satisfactory and seems to be reverting back for the most part to the overly complicated and inflexible existing rules rather than setting out a framework and simplifying the rules as originally envisaged. Let's hope the European Parliament deliberations which have started will come forward with a better set of proposals. Ultimately the Trilogue negotiations will have to sort this out but it seems this is unlikely to happen any time soon.

The latest ICES Advice for certain demersal and pelagic (herring and sprat) species has been published recently and while there is positive news for certain demersal stocks in the Irish sea, Celtic sea and area VI, there is a very surprising large increase in Irish Sea herring. This large increase in the Irish Sea herring TAC (due to a change in the assessment model) will have a negative effect on Celtic Sea herring in future years but not for next year's advice and must be challenged.

The KFO held its Annual General meeting on May 19, 2017 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, which did not change from 2016, is as follows: Michael Cavanagh, Chairman; Pete McBride, Vice-Chairman; Cathal Boyle, Jens Bach, Eamonn McGuinness, Ciaran Doherty, Pauric Conneely, Tony Byrne and Eamonn McHugh.

This year the KFO AGM departed from its usual format; in view of the many problems facing the industry we decided to invite our local representatives to a special session at the AGM. We were joined by Pat 'the Cope' Gallagher, TD; Thomas Pringle, TD; Charlie McConalogue, TD, and Greg Harkin representing Minister Joe McHugh. The event proved to be very successful with the representatives displaying a good grasp of and interest in issues outlined. This was a very worthwhile exercise and all present agreed we should continue with this practice at future AGMs

Important Dates July - September 2017

June 29-July 2	BIM National Seafood Conference/Harnessing Our Ocean Wealth Conference /Sea Fest	Galway
July 4	NWWAC assesment ICES Scientific Advice	Edinburgh
July 5	NWWAC assessment of EC Proposals on Technical Measures	Edinburgh
July 5	NWWAC, WG 1,2, 3 & 4	Edinburgh
July 6	NWWAC, WG for Landings Obligation, ExCom	Edinburgh
July 11-12	Pelagic AC, WG 1& 2, ExCom	The Hague
July 13	SFPA Consultative Committee Meeting	Galway
July 17-18	Fisheries Council	Brussels
July 19	Seafisheries Liaison Group Meeting	Dublin
July 20	Monthly Whitefish Quota Management Meeting	Dublin/Clonakilty
Aug 5	Blessing of the Fleet	Killybegs
Aug 30-Sep 5	ICES WG WIDE (Pelagic Stocks)	Copenhagen
Sept 12-14	ICES ADGWIDE	Copenhagen
Sept 14-15	NWWAC, General Assembly, ExCom, WGs	Dublin
Sept 26	Markets Advisory Council (MAC) General Assembly	Brussels
Sep 27	MAC Workshop on PMPs	Brussels
Sep 29	ICES Advice (Pelagic Stocks) Published	Copenhagen
Sep 29	EAP0 AGM	Ostend

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