

Report from: Malcolm Morrison

Report date: 26 July 2011

Event: SFF Whitefish Focus Group

Place: SFF Boardroom

Date: 25 July 2011

Organiser: Bertie Armstrong

Participants: Leslie Tait (SFA Chair)
Hansen Black (SFA)
Mike Park (SWFPA)
Michael Buchan (SWFPA)
Tam Harcus (OFA)
Ross Dougal (FSAS)

Attendance: Bertie Armstrong (SFF)
Alan Coghill (SFF)
Malcolm Morrison (SFF)

AGENDA AND REPORT

1. Welcome and apologies

L Tait thanked everyone for attending and an electronic link with Mallaig was tried but unfortunately failed to work well enough to be of use.

2. Stock Science – ICES advice – opportunities for 2012 (also discussed Item 4 on Industry led data)

LT outlined the spring advice received at the Marine Lab for NS Cod, Haddock, Saithe and Plaice, of which all were positive except Saithe. He then ran through WC Cod - negative; Haddock - positive; Whiting - precautionary; monk - precautionary; megrim - precautionary; Rockall Haddock was also negative.

MP informed the group that all the member states had voted against the introduction of the automatic 25% cut in TAC for data deficient species, although it would be prudent to guard against such a cut being introduced anyway. Notably, the NS whiting which currently has an increase of 15% advised, would drop to a 25% cut because of the lack of biological reference points.

The strong regional growth of certain cod stocks was spoken about, but it was felt that as SFF policy already was against FU management for Nephrops, there was little to be gained by arguing for the opposite approach to cod stocks.

There was discuss on whether all Member States gave as much priority to providing data, and it seems the UK is one of the few to try and fulfil the regulation.

It was thought that in the reform there may be scope for fishing based evidence to be brought into the system, and a paper from NAFC outlining how this happens in the US and Canada was considered.

It was agreed to ask Dr Napier of NAFC to scope his suggestions out further, and with reference to the work going on in the NS and NWW RAC's on weak assessment and data deficiencies, seek to discover what date could be delivered by this proposal, and if it would be suitable for using in the process of TAC and quota setting. For the group the crux of the matter was whether this data could help generate more fishing opportunities. There was agreement on the need to produce data that ICES would accept, with reference to the fact that the North Sea Stock Survey is now after 10 years being recognised, although not used.

There was discussion on fishing effort and the effects of limitation, and it was agreed that, contrary to the commission view, there was no linear relationship between effort and mortality. The Federation is to respond by September on the effects of effort control.

3. **Proposals for a Discard Ban**

The discussion started by illustrating the difficulties of moving this debate on a technical matter into the political arena, but it was felt that the Scottish Government now saw that the simple statement 'no discards' was not good enough, but need to work towards realistic solutions. This reasoning would need to be followed up with Marine Scotland.

The prospect of CCTV for all was mentioned in the reform paper and all could see that would bring its own problems. The paper also spoke of fishing vessels not sailing without ensuring sufficient quota was there for the trip, and as everything caught would come off quotas, the need for selectivity to be used and incentivised was apparent.

The Norwegian Discard Ban was discussed, but the feeling was that was a different issue, and in the EU, CCTV was being seen as the mandatory tool to prove there were no discards. The Norwegian stance on not allowing the extra fish from the discard column back into the catches was recognised as part of their market capturing position. Similarly the Danish fleet can be seen to fill the gap in the Nephrops market as our fleet struggled to catch without discards.

It was agreed that MP would summarise the discarding issues, bringing a paper, through the Horizon Scanning Committees including discussions with Marine Scotland on what they saw as being the way ahead with proposed ban and looking to get their support for the Scottish Fleet in ensuring there was sufficient catching opportunity to sustain the fleet.

4. **Catch Quotas**

The problem was highlighted, that in future Norway are against allowing the extra fish for CQ to come from the discard column. This could mean CQ's are either abandoned or Marine Scotland would need to top slice other fish to keep it going. The meeting agreed to oppose any top slicing of quotas from FQA's to facilitate the CQ scheme continuing.

There was discussion of how the system copes with single or multi species approaches, particularly how to have all species at MSY. Various species were discussed, hake as predators being a prime example, but the cod/nephrops relationship was seen as the one where science really needed to grasp the predator prey aspect. MSY as a goal for the EU was not using the phrase from the Johannesburg protocol "where possible", and the group agreed that all species could not hit MSY at the same time, but a multispecies approach would need to set targets close to that point.

It was agreed that the federation would need to try and get its points explained to politicians, especially MEPs in light of co-decision.

The West Coast was seen as having its own problems with CQ and with the lack of quota it would be closed very quickly.

The discussion moved on to the difficulties caused by the scheme in inflating the leasing costs, especially for cod. This could be seen as creating almost artificial track records for the vessels in the scheme. It was agreed that we needed to put down a marker with the Government that they needed to revert to the FQA system in future and not disadvantage vessels who had not been in the first phase of the CCTV.

This gave rise to a mention of the proposed new concordat between the devolved administrations and that we would need to oppose any shuffling of fish, such as was foreseen in England.

5. **AOB**

Quick mention was made of the work at NWWRAC on West Coast Haddock emergency measures to address the rapid growth in the stock. The catch composition rules needed to be changed, involving a discard reduction plan for the whole of VIA, which will impact on the Nephrops TR2 fleet.

Actions

Dr Napier of NAFC to scope his suggestions out further, seek to discover what date could be delivered by this proposal, and if it would be suitable for using in the process of TAC and quota setting

The Federation is to respond by September on the effects of effort control.

This reasoning against simplistic use of the phrase “discard ban” would need to be followed up with Marine Scotland

MP would summarise the discarding issues, bringing a paper, through the Horizon Scanning Committees including discussions with Marine Scotland on what they saw as being the way ahead with proposed ban and looking to get their support for the Scottish Fleet in ensuring there was sufficient catching opportunity to sustain the fleet

The meeting agreed to oppose any top slicing of quotas from FQA's to facilitate the CQ scheme continuing

It was agreed that the federation would need to try and get its points on MSY explained to politicians, especially MEPs in light of co-decision.

It was agreed that we needed to put down a marker with the Government that they needed to revert to the FQA system in future and not disadvantage vessels who had not been in the first phase of the CCTV.

Oppose any shuffling of fish, such as was foreseen in England, following agreement of the Fisheries Management concordat.