

Meeting of the Interim Executive Committee Meeting of the North Sea RAC (NSRAC), Copenhagen, September 15th 2004

The chair, Hugo Andersson welcomed participants to the Interim Executive Committee of the North Sea Regional Advisory Council (NSRAC), organised by the North Sea Commission Fisheries Partnership. After introductions by participants Tony Hawkins reported on progress with setting up the NSRAC.

Progress in establishing the NSRAC

The Proposal for the NSRAC, prepared by the Partnership's RAC Development Working Group and discussed at the Aberdeen meeting on June 15th, had been submitted to Member States at the beginning of August. Concerned Member States had commented through the UK administration and following small changes to the text had agreed to submit the Proposal to the European Commission. Member States had also agreed to provide 10% of funding for the NSRAC (10% of €220,000) for the first 3 years. The Proposal had been submitted to the European Commission on September 10th, and formal approval of the RAC was now awaited. In the meantime, organisations seeking membership of the NSRAC had been asked through advertisements in the fishing press to submit a letter of application to the Secretariat (Ann Bell at Aberdeenshire Council, Scotland, ann.bell@aberdeenshire.gov.uk). Membership would then be decided by common agreement between concerned Member States, aiming at a balance between the Member States and conformation with the two-thirds/one-third division between the fisheries sector and other interested parties laid down in the Council Decision.

The first General Assembly of NSRAC would be held in Edinburgh on November 4th 2004 and would be followed on November 5th by a preliminary meeting of the Executive Committee, following its appointment by the General Assembly. It was recognised that some of those appointed to the Executive Committee might not be able to remain for November 5th. However much work needed to be done and the sooner the Committee met the better. The Executive Committee (with a maximum complement of 24) would consist of at least one representative of the catching sector of each concerned Member State and other representatives of the fisheries sector (two thirds of the total), together with representatives of other interest groups (one third of the total).

NSRAC would be a legal entity: either an unincorporated body established in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure, or a limited company established under Scots' Law, whose members would be the Executive Committee with a smaller group of Directors. Both these options were now being considered by the Commission. A domain name had already been registered for

the RAC's web site: www.nsrac.org. (**Action: Commission to consider the two alternatives for the legal entity of NSRAC**).

Membership of the NSRAC

In discussion, Peter Sand Mortensen of the European Transport Workers Federation (ETF) said that his organisation, which represented workers in the fishing industry, had told the European Commission that it wished to participate in each of the RACs. However, he had not personally received any information on the NSRAC. It was pointed out that it had been open to a wide range of organisations to set up a RAC for the North Sea or other areas. The Partnership had taken the initiative to establish the NSRAC and it was to be commended for doing so and for inviting a wide range of organisations to join in. The chairman pointed out that Mortensen's organisation, the ETF, had been invited to take part in the Interim Executive Committee, and its views would be listened to, alongside those of others. The NSRAC was about to begin. It was to be an inclusive organisation, and there was still an opportunity for all interested organisations, both national and European, to play a full role.

The position of women's groups was queried; should they be part of the fisheries sector or included within the other interests? The Council Decision placed women's groups within the fisheries sector, but following discussion with the Commission it had been decided that if a particular women's group saw itself as playing a wider role, and wished to join the other interests, then it could do so. The North Sea Women's Network had decided that it represented many different aspects of local communities. It wished to join the other interests.

It was now very important for all organisations wishing to join the RAC to submit their applications to the Secretariat. Member States were asked to send information on the NSRAC to all the interested parties. To facilitate this process a short report on the meeting would be circulated to the Member States with a covering letter to be sent out to relevant organisations. Applications should be sent in to Ann Bell as quickly as possible. They would then be forwarded through the UK administration to concerned Member States, which would reach agreement on those organisations which could participate as members of the General Assembly of the NSRAC, as laid down in the Council Decision (**Action: Rapporteur, UK & other Member States**).

Jaroslav Zieliński, of the Polish North Atlantic Producers Organisation, asked why Polish fishermen had not been included within the NSRAC. It was pointed out that the Polish administration had been asked whether it wished to be regarded as a concerned Member State with respect to the North Sea, and had replied that it did not. Unless Poland expressed a wish to participate, and joined the other concerned Member States in their application to the Commission, Polish fishermen could only participate as observers. Polish fishers would be

listed as members until this issue had been resolved (**Action: Jaroslaw Zieliński to contact Polish Administration**).

Composition of the Executive Committee

It was agreed that national catching organisations of the different Member States should be represented on the Executive Committee in rough proportion to their economic interests in the North Sea. The catching sector of each concerned Member State would have at least one seat, as stated in the Council Decision. The main European organisations could be represented by one seat each. Workers in the fishing industry could be represented both through the ETF and other organisations which included workers amongst their members.

It was agreed (with a reservation from the ETF with respect to its own position) that the following composition for the Executive Committee was balanced and would be recommended for adoption by the General Assembly:

Catchers' Organisation Belgium
Catchers' Organisation France x 2
Catchers' Organisation Denmark x 2
Catchers' Organisation Germany
Catchers' Organisation Netherlands x 2
Catchers' Organisation Poland
Catchers' Organisation Spain
Catchers' Organisation Sweden
Catchers' Organisation United Kingdom x 2
European Organisation for Fish Traders
European Association of Fishing Ports and Auctions
European Transport Worker's Federation

16

Green-NGO x 3
Consumer
Aquaculture Producer
Fisher-Recreational
North Sea Women's Network
One Other Organisation

8

24

Although it was considered desirable to leave some vacancies within the proposed Executive Committee it seemed likely that all 24 seats would be occupied from the start. Other organisations which might claim a seat included

recreational fishing tackle manufacturers. It was agreed that the composition of the Executive Committee should not be cast in stone. The Interim Executive Committee would recommend to the General Assembly that the composition of the Executive Committee should be reviewed after one year.

The NSRAC faced a huge task, and many different interests would be represented on it. However, not all the issues to be addressed would involve disagreement between participants. It was hoped that most questions would be resolved through consensus. Moreover, there would be opportunities for other organisations to become involved, both through the General Assembly and through Working Groups.

Appointment of Chairs

The Chair of the General Assembly is a position of great honour. It requires an impartial person of high standing, with some knowledge of fishing, able to approach the Commission, Parliament and other organisations seeking support for the NSRAC. Participants were asked to come forward with nominations which could be presented to the General Assembly. The question of whether a Member of the European Parliament, or a member of its Fisheries Committee, could serve as chair of the General Assembly was raised, and this will be considered by the Commission (**Action: Commission**).

Nominations for the Chair of the Executive Committee must be made at the General Assembly, but the choice of Chair is to be decided by the Executive Committee itself. Nominations to go forward to the General Assembly were invited. Gerard van Balsfoort from the Netherlands was nominated by the Danish fishermen's representative and supported by the representative of the European Organisation for Fish Traders. Hugo Andersson from Sweden was nominated by the German fishermen's representative and supported by the Scottish fishermen's representative. Both nominees were willing to accept their nomination.

Vice-chairs will be required for both the General Assembly and the Executive Committee. It was agreed that there should be two vice-chairs for the Executive Committee, one from the fishing sector and one from other interests. A proposal from the ETF that one of the vice-chairs should be allotted to them did not receive general support.

The Secretary requested that further nominations for the chairs and vice-chairs should be sent to her by October 15th. However, additional nominations could be made from the floor at the General Assembly (**Action: participants in Interim Executive Committee**).

Active observers to the RAC

A range of bodies would be able to attend the General Assembly and the Executive Committee as active observers, and would be able to speak at these meetings, as set out in the Council Decision. These organisations included:

Concerned Member States
European Commission
Advisory Committee on Fisheries & Aquaculture
North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission

North Sea Commission Executive
OSPAR Commission
Norwegian Fisheries Directorate
Norwegian Fishermen's Association
European Association of Fisheries Economists
Europêche
Cogeca
European Association of Fish Producers Organisations
Other RACs

In addition, meetings of the NSRAC would be open and the Press and persons with an interest in North Sea Fisheries could attend as non-active observers by prior arrangement with the Secretariat.

It was suggested that a Code of Practice should be prepared for observers. It was recommended that the one adopted by the Baltic Sea Fisheries Commission would provide an appropriate model, and Michael Andersen agreed to provide a copy to the Secretariat (**Action: Michael Andersen**).

Consultative arrangements with the Commission & Member States

The NSRAC would need to interact closely with the Commission and Member States over the provision of advice. Regular discussions would need to take place and it was recommended that there should initially be meetings with the Commission, Member States and other RACs every 6 months. Briefing meetings should also be held with the European Parliament Fisheries Committee.

Agenda for the General Assembly on November 4th

A provisional agenda was proposed for the First General Assembly Meeting, on November 4, in Edinburgh. At this first formal meeting of the NSRAC it would be necessary to:

Agree Rules of Procedure

Appoint the Chair & Vice Chair for the General Assembly

Appoint the Executive Committee

Nominate candidates for the Chair and 2 Vice Chairs of the Executive Committee

Discuss advice from the NSRAC on flatfish

Suggest possible Working Groups

Agree a Timetable for 2005

Hold a discussion session, allowing free comment by members

A draft agenda would be circulated to the members of the NSRAC before the General Assembly for further comment (**Action: Secretary**).

Liaison with ICES and with EAFE

It would be important for the NSRAC to be able to draw upon scientific and economic advice. The Secretariat would be contacting ICES to discuss liaison arrangements. The European Association of Fisheries Economists (EAFE) had already agreed to co-ordinate the provision of economic advice for the NSRAC and participants welcomed this arrangement (**Action: Secretary to talk to ICES**).

Formation of Working Groups

Working Groups on the following topics had been suggested at earlier meetings:

- Kattegat/Skaggerrak
- Nephrops
- Economics
- Spatial Planning/Marine Protected Areas
- Ecosystem Approach
- Flatfish WG
- Demersal Fish

This list was not exclusive, and other suggestions would undoubtedly come forward in November at the General Assembly. It was thought that a Working Group on Technical Measures might be especially important to enable

clarification of those measures which worked and those which did not. Ideas on a range of potential Working Group topics should be developed by members, discussed with others and brought to the General Assembly. Some Working Groups might need to meet regularly, as standing committees. Others might be *ad hoc*. Working Groups would be valuable sources of advice, but could be expensive and it would be important to plan wisely. **(Action: suggestions for Working Groups to be considered by participants and brought to the General Assembly).**

Funding

Funding for the first year of NSRAC is assured. The Commission would be providing 90%, and concerned Member States had agreed to provide the remaining 10% for the first three years. In subsequent years funding from these sources would diminish and the NSRAC itself would have to provide an increasing contribution, as shown below:

	Total	Commission		Member States	NSRAC
1st Year	€220,000	€200,000 (90%)		€22,000	€0
2nd Year	€220,000	€165,000 (75%)		€22,000	€33,000
3rd Year	€220,000	€132,000 (60%)		€22,000	€66,000
4th Year	€220,000	€121,000 (55%)		€0	€99,000
5th Year	€220,000	€110,000 (50%)		€0	€110,000

The Commission would provide an additional €50,000 pa for translation and interpretation

Participants considered ways of making up the deficit. Some funding might come from the new [European Fisheries Fund](#), and this possibility would need to be drawn to the attention of Member States. Sponsors might also provide a contribution. Moreover, Member States might be persuaded to contribute greater sums if they were assured the money would be spent wisely and the NSRAC provided added value. The issue of a membership fee was also discussed. It was concluded that the payment of a fee to participate as a Member of the General Assembly would be a measure of commitment to the NSRAC. However, it was recognised that some organisations were richer than others, and that most organisations would belong to several RACs. It was suggested that ordinary members might be asked to contribute €250 and that members of the Executive Committee might contribute €1,000. However, although it was agreed that a fee would be necessary, the actual sum to be contributed would be left for the General Assembly to consider.

The view was expressed that the NSRAC could save €50,000 by dispensing with translation and interpretation and conducting all its affairs in English. The Secretary pointed out that this sum could not be transferred to other expenditure.

After discussion it was agreed that a proposal should go forward to the General Assembly to provide oral interpretation only into the language of the Member State in which a meeting was being held, but key working documents would be translated into French as well.

Preparation of a Business Plan

One of the first tasks for the Executive Committee would be to prepare a Business Plan which would lay out the priorities for the NSRAC and set a timetable for different activities. Funding would also need to be considered as part of the plan.

Keeping stakeholders informed

The existence of the NSRAC would now need further publicity. Each participant would need to feed back information to those they represented on the NSRAC. Information should also be provided to the fishing press and other publications. A web site was being established but would not be operating until the beginning of November (**Action: Participants to tell their members about the NSRAC and the planned General Assembly on November 4th**).

Advice on North Sea flatfish

The Commission had specifically requesting advice from the developing NSRAC on plaice and other flatfish in the North Sea. A workshop had been held on the previous day and information presented by the Commission and its scientists on the measures which were being considered for flatfish.

The last meeting of the Fisheries Council had decided that plaice stocks in the North Sea required a recovery plan. However, plaice were not caught in isolation but together with sole and other species. A recovery plan already applied to fisheries which captured cod. One of the main elements of reform for the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) was an emphasis on a long term approach, which would first be applied to those stocks subject to recovery plans and then extended to sole and to gadoids like the haddock, whiting and saithe. The Commission had set up an *ad hoc* scientific committee with Norway to consider a long term approach.

An earlier paper (described as a non-paper) from the Commission had looked at long term proposals for plaice and other flatfish in the North Sea. It had stressed the need to reduce the high fishing mortality on plaice. Discarding in the plaice fishery also needed to be reduced and better compliance with the regulations

achieved. In the past the reduction in fishing mortality would have been sought through a lower TAC. Now, reductions in fishing effort were in the picture too. It was for Member States to decide how the reduction in fishing mortality on plaice was to be achieved.

A meeting of scientists had taken place in June to devise appropriate harvest control rules for stocks at risk. It had confirmed that genuine long term benefits in terms of higher yields and lower risks would be gained by moving towards a lower fishing mortality for plaice. There were fewer gains for sole in reducing fishing mortality. New assessments would shortly be available for plaice and sole, although it was recognized that these would be retrospective. Better methods of assessment were urgently required.

There had been discussion at the Workshop of how the reduction in fishing mortality for plaice might be achieved. The fisheries directed specifically at plaice had already had their effort greatly reduced. The fleet targeting sole could not be managed just for that species and it was accepted that there would also need to be a reduction in effort for that fishery too.

Because there was little support for the Commission's own proposals amongst fishermen and fish processors, an alternative plan had been produced with the support of the Dutch fishing industry, and this plan was currently being discussed with other stakeholders. The main elements of the plan were:

- improved stock assessments for plaice,
- reductions of discards in the 80mm beam trawl fishery,
- effort reductions, and
- stability in TACs for the next three years.

The Commission pointed out that it ultimately carries responsibility for the stability of stocks. It commended the presentation of a plan by the fishing industry, but would require further information before it could accept and adopt such a plan. In particular, the Commission needed a clear indication of the levels of reduction in fishing mortality which would be achieved through the plan. The reduction would need to match the long term targets to be set by scientists. It would be difficult to accept a fixed TAC for three years, as this approach would not be responsive to changes in the stocks. Any recovery plan for plaice would need to contain clear targets, and a timescale would need to be set for the recovery. Any plan put forward by the fishing industry must comply with these requirements. The Commission recognized, however, that unless measures for reducing fishing mortality on plaice were supported by fishermen they would not succeed. It looked forward to seeing a further development of the plan, with an indication of how the target reductions in fishing mortality would be met and the timescale

over which the measures would be applied. The industry would also need to ensure compliance with any measures proposed.

The flatfish group of the European Association of Producers' Organisations (EAPO), with the help of the Dutch fishing industry, had prepared the draft outline for NSRAC advice on plaice recovery for discussion at the Interim Executive Committee. Because of time constraints, the Interim Executive Committee decided to take the draft advice forward through an *ad hoc* Flatfish Working Group. Further information on the assessments for plaice and sole (and also for cod) would be made available at the Consultation Meeting between ICES and the NSC Fisheries Partnership on October 4th and 5th in Copenhagen. The Partnership itself would also be discussing the assessments at its meeting on October 6th. With new information on the assessments, a revised plan would be developed, based on the advice produced by EAPO, and taking into account a paper which had been prepared by the WWF. The new draft plan would be presented and discussed at the NSRAC General Assembly on November 4th and then taken forward by the newly appointed Executive Committee on November 5th. Nathalie Steins would chair the Flatfish Working Group and would begin by defining the Terms of Reference and setting a date for the meeting. Potential members of the Working Group would include representatives of the fishing industry from Denmark, Belgium, the Netherlands, the UK and other interested Member States, together with Seas at Risk and WWF. Organisations wishing to take part in the Working Group should contact Nathalie Steins. (**Action: Nathalie Steins to set terms of reference and date for the Flatfish Working Group; participants to nominate members**).

The meeting was brought to a close with a reminder that those organisations wishing to participate in the General Assembly on November 4th should write to the Secretary, who would pass their details on to the concerned Member States. Membership would ultimately be decided by agreement between the Member States.