

Report of the
Ad Hoc Working Group on Computerisation of the NEAFC
Secretariat

27 February 2002

1. OPENING BY THE CHAIRMAN

The Chairman, Mr. Jacques Verborgh, EU, called the meeting to order. He welcomed those delegations present. All Contracting Parties were represented, except Poland. He noted the documents available and referred to the last meeting of the Group in October 2001. In addition to reviewing progress on the implementation of the technical stipulations of the Scheme, the 20th Annual Meeting had mandated the Group to look into alternative communications protocols. He also noted the Group would report to the Extraordinary Meeting of the Commission between 10 – 12 April 2002. A list of participants is given as Annex 1.

2. APPOINTMENT OF THE RAPPORTEUR

The Secretariat was appointed as rapporteur.

3. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

The agenda was adopted.

4. REPORT ON THE OPERATION AND THE CURRENT STATUS OF THE COMPUTER SYSTEM OF THE NEAFC SECRETARIAT

The Secretariat gave a short description of the recent upgrading of the NEAFC computer system, which now has one “exchange” server for Internet and office applications, and one server for the VMS database. The “exchange” server uses a broadband connection and is protected by a firewall and the VMS database server is not linked to the Internet.

It was noted that the amendments to the Scheme agreed at the 20th Annual Meeting had entered into force on 15 February 2002. The only amendment of any consequence for the database was the introduction of new latitude–longitude formats (LT/LG) (according to Annex VII. 5) and Annex VIII C. The system will, however, still accommodate the old format (LA/LO), if so required by the Contracting Parties. If Contracting Parties change to the new format they should not revert to the old format.

With respect to the state of implementation of the Scheme the following points were noted:

For a number of communication parties, automatic exchange is restricted to position messages. With regard to the CP’s monthly catch statistics (Article 8 and Annex V), only Norway and the EU have fully implemented these requirements. Some parties supply data but not automatically, while some do not send all the relevant information.

The Scheme is quite detailed in the requirements for reporting catches, but does not stipulate the format for reporting aggregated catches back to Contracting Parties.

The Secretariat then raised the question of meeting the requirements of the Scheme. The Scheme currently stipulates the need to use record numbers, which allows the system to send return messages to the Contracting Parties. This provides quality control and control on whether messages have been received by the database. A couple of examples showing the problems caused if return messages are not checked were given. In the Secretariat’s opinion, this

demonstrates the need to exercise quality control when record numbers and return messages are essential.

In Annex 2 it is shown by Contracting Party how reports and messages required by the Scheme are reported.

Annex 3 gives statistics on the number of messages by communication parties. The large increase stems mainly from reporting more often than every six hours as foreseen in the Scheme. Over 100,000 messages are expected this year, judging from the trend hitherto.

ACTIONS ARISING, Status Of The Computer System Of The Neafc Secretariat:
The format of the reports of aggregated catches to Contracting Parties will be considered.

5. PROGRESS REPORTS BY CONTRACTING PARTIES ON COMPUTERISATION AND DATA COMMUNICATION WITH THE NEAFC SECRETARIAT

Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) - Faroe Islands indicated that any outstanding requirements would be sorted out soon. **Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) - Greenland** asked what was meant by inconsistent time data. He thought this was an effect of skippers changing their mind. They will attempt to use return messages and will introduce the new longitude-latitude format.

Iceland informed the meeting that their system was up and running, fully implementing the Scheme with the exception of Annex V messages. Nevertheless this exception is due to administrative problems and not to technical IT difficulties.

Norway is expecting to have the system up and running vis-à-vis Coastguard Inspection craft (Annex X and XI messages) in the near future.

Russia had experienced some problems with messages, which were not accepted by the system, but that would be sorted out. They are looking into improving the reporting of transhipments. The problems over transhipment to other Contracting Parties' vessels was mentioned.

The EU member states then reported.

Denmark will implement the requirements of the Scheme before the start of the season, but would not improve on record numbers or return messages until the NEAFC Commission had made a decision.

Sweden will continue to improve implementation. A Swedish vessel will act as an inspection platform in June and July.

Spain did not report any change from last year. They use record numbers but have had some problems reconciling record numbers. They are reporting and receiving messages automatically by X.25 with many different FMCs without major problems, but experience important delays with the NEAFC X.25 network. The problem of notification may not be with the flag state but with the EU Commission. Spain is very happy with the X.25 protocol, which handles a huge volume of messages in the Spanish administration. Changing the VMS data to another protocol would be costly. Annex X and Annex XI messages (SEN, SEX and OBS) are being sent via X.25.

Germany had no problems with VMS messages. Lack of notification had been a problem but would be resolved this year. It would be difficult to change from X.25 and it would not want to implement records numbers and return messages. The return messages caused problems. Other problems will be addressed.

Netherlands is still working on putting automatic reporting into play.

Portugal informed the situation has not changed since their report at the last meeting. Portugal does not filter messages to reduce the number forwarded to NEAFC. Some of the messages resent to NEAFC are due to transits between the mainland, Azores and Madeira sub-areas of the Portuguese EEZ.

Ireland had had problems with notification, but thought that the situation had improved and the notification of the authorised list is now in order. Annex VII messages are sent automatically by VMS whilst Annex X and XI are still sent by fax but include a record number. Also cancellation messages and the problem of X.25 had to be sorted out before deciding whether to spend money modifying the system. However, modifications are undertaken internally in Ireland, creating a virtual network. This would also mean merging different data sources. Ireland will continue to develop X.25 in line with the NEAFC agreement.

The **UK** is now sending position messages automatically. Problems with the vessel list had been sorted and further upgrading would sort out the call sign problems. Annex VII is sent via e-mail. The UK would not act on the record number until further clarification had been sought. It might be possible to remove the need for record numbers and return message by using new protocols which may provide more handshaking functions than was the case with X.25. the UK next wished to work closely with the Secretariat to implement automatic reception of data from the NEAFC database by its patrol vessels whilst in NEAFC waters.

France was not represented.

The **European Commission** (DG Fish) was happy with X.25 and had looked into the acknowledgment procedures and problems. The system had been tuned to deal with this. Inconsistencies had been noted in notifications, but problems had to be handled by the individual Member States. Problems with the area codes, which had been discussed with the Member States, had now improved. Surveillance messages are still forwarded by fax, but automatic reporting by X.25 is being discussed. It would like more information in the error descriptions of the return messages.

The **Secretariat** noted that the problem of notification continues to be a timing issue, and that it is clear there is a difference in opinion about which vessels have to be notified (transit, fishing for unregulated resources, etc). With regard to the issue of error messages the possibility of including the wrong data element in the return message in future should be investigated.

The Chairman summarised that work still had to be done and he would like to see progress on the implementation of the Scheme by the next meeting.

<p>Actions arising, progress in implementation by Contracting Parties: Progress in implementation of the requirements of the Scheme should be reviewed at the next meeting of the Group.</p>

6. POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVE COMMUNICATION PROTOCOLS TO THOSE PROVIDED FOR IN THE SCHEME

The Scheme requires the use of X.400 or X.25 communication protocols. Some Contracting Parties had not experienced problems and were happy with these protocols, but in some countries these protocols will be phased out. Therefore, the NEAFC Commission has mandated the Group to consider this question.

Iceland tabled a paper at the last meeting on this item. The provisional conclusion of that meeting was that the HTTP protocol with SSL encryption seemed to be the most promising. The EU Commission supported the earlier conclusion on HTTPS (128 bit encryption- used in e-banking). The set up costs have not been investigated in any depth, but are expected to be low compared to other solutions. Running costs would be similar for all solutions and will not be dependent on transmission volume, but will incur a fixed monthly charge.

The Group agreed to perform trials to test the protocols, discuss the results at the next meeting of the Group and then report to the 21st Annual Meeting. There seemed to be preferences for HTTP eventually under VPN and starting as soon as possible. Iceland, UK, Spain, Portugal and Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) – Greenland would consider participating in the trials. The trials should in principle be open to all Contracting Parties. The Secretariat will issue a note as soon as possible setting up the framework for the trials.

Actions arising, alternative protocols: Trials of alternative communication protocols, especially HTTPS, eventually under VPN, will be started as soon as possible. Some parties have already committed themselves to take part in the trials, but they will be open to all communication partners. The Secretariat will circulate a note on the framework for the trials as soon as possible

7. EVALUATION OF THE USE OF RECORD NUMBERS

The Scheme stipulates that the Secretariat shall send return messages. The important part of the message is the record number, which makes it possible to identify which message is causing problems. There is difference of opinion about the usefulness of return messages. The record number had been referred to this group, whereas return messages have been referred to PECCOE.

The following main points of view were made:

The stipulations of the Scheme on return messages should be followed until such time that something else could replace the present system. Return messages were the easiest way to ensure that a message had been received - simple and effective.

Experience has shown that return messages are not needed and other way should be sought to secure quality control. The loss of individual position messages was not a problem. Identification of messages should be related to the importance of the message. The consequences of the risk of losing messages had to be compared to costs.

It was noted that the NEAFC database has a purpose - to be able to send information to inspection platforms to optimise inspection. This should be kept in mind when discussing the control of the data sent out to inspection platforms.

It was accepted that the Scheme has certain requirements, but this should not prevent changes in the light of experience gained. There may be ways to construct quality control in a different way without changing the Scheme, based on common sense.

It was noted that there had been an open and frank discussion and positions seemed not to have changed since the last meeting.

Actions arising, record numbers: Opinion is divided on the importance of record numbers. The discussion in PECCOE on return messages and the trials with new communication protocols are important in this context.

8. REPORT TO THE EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE COMMISSION

The report will be presented to the Extraordinary Meeting 10-12 April 2002.

9. DATE AND PLACE OF THE NEXT MEETING

It was agreed to propose to the Commission that the Group meets again on 2 October 2002 in London if no Contracting Party issues an invitation.

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The only issue under this item was a presentation by Ms. Kourti from the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission entitled "New technologies to support monitoring of the EU fisheries policy". Copies of the presentation can be requested from the presenter.

The Chairman thanked the Group and stressed the importance of testing new communication protocols, hoping for results to be reported to the 21st Annual Meeting.

12 March 2002