

REPORT OF THE
AD HOC WORKING GROUP ON COMPUTERISATION OF THE
SECRETARIAT
16 October 2001
NEAFC Headquarters (22 Berners Street) London, UK

1. Opening by the Chairman

The Chairman, Mr. Harry Koster, EU, called the meeting to order at 10 am. He explained that the Mr. Jacques Verborgh, who was the elected Chairman, had, due to other obligations, not been able to attend the meeting and had asked him to substitute. The meeting accepted the substitution. He welcomed delegations from all Contracting Parties, except Poland. A list of participants is given as Annex 1.

2. Appointment of Rapporteur

The Secretariat was appointed as rapporteur

3. Adoption of the Agenda

Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) suggested that the agenda should also cover discussion of alternative communication protocols. Iceland informed that they had prepared a paper on alternatives. It was agreed to address this under agenda items 5 and 6. The Chairman would aim at closing the meeting around 4:30. The agenda was then adopted.

4. Report on the Operation and Current Status of the Computer System of the NEAFC Secretariat

The Secretariat presented Working Document “*AHWG Computerisation October 2001/3, Report on Scheme Implementation – 2001*”, listing the status of communication of the different types of messages foreseen under the Scheme by different Contracting Parties. The Secretariat also presented “*AHWG Computerisation October 2001/4*” identifying data transmission problems leading to the rejection of messages by the NEAFC database. This was accompanied by statistics on data transmission (“*AHWG Computerisation October 2001/6, Data Transmission Statistics*”). It is clearly shown in the material that there has been a huge increase in the number of messages. (in June 2000 there were 7,564 messages, and in June 2001 24,180 messages). Statistics on the number of error messages show that the percentage of these is very high.

The following points were made in the ensuing discussion:

The volume is even greater than shown in the statistics because they only show received messages. It was acknowledged that the system had to support a larger number of communication partners than anticipated (the Faroe Islands and Greenland as two entities and several EU Member States in addition to the EU Commission). A number of countries report on a smaller timescale than the 6 hours originally anticipated, increasing the volume up to 4 times. X.25 is old fashioned and is easily jammed, so data may not be available in real time. Serious problems have been experienced, when data have to be made available in real time to several inspection platforms. It is not possible at the moment to predict the reporting volume until the intentions of the Contracting Parties are known. A better estimate of anticipated reporting volume is necessary to ensure that the system has the correct capacity. It should be borne in mind that the NEAFC system handles signals in a way other systems do not. The database not only receives data, but also acknowledges and distributes data automatically. Software is not the problem, but rather communication links. It was noted that some data required real time handling, while other could wait for off peak handling. The capacity of the NEAFC system should be increased, but there may be ways to treat data differently so as not to clog the system.

5. Progress Reports by Contracting Parties on Computerisation and Data Communication with the NEAFC Secretariat

Norway had submitted a paper on the Norwegian experiences with the system. They agreed with the findings of the Secretariat and thought this stressed the need for a cancellation message. For the period up to November 2001 Norway sent 9,000 messages and received 7,200 return messages, which indicates satisfactory running of the system. X.25 had not caused problems, and the software is still being upgraded.

POS messages are sent every hour, and NOT, AUT, SUS and WIT messages are automated. JUR and REP are computerised, but also sent by fax at the request of the Secretariat. Entry and departure messages need to be more automated. The inspection platform messages need more work. Return messages are still missing, but the overall picture is that the system is working. In summary, there is scope for improvement, but a number of problems have been solved. Spain questioned if hourly reporting was in accordance with the Scheme, which required at least six hourly reporting

Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) asked if missing return messages were a problem stemming from the Norwegian system or from the NEAFC database. Norway referred to the statistics in their paper, but was not quite sure where the problem lies. The Secretariat noted that error messages are created when data are unreadable, inconsistent with the Scheme or a mandatory field is missing. Sequence error is also a problem. The system demands that records are sequentially numbered, but they are still accepted. **EU-Portugal** receives 1,500 incoming messages every day, which are forwarded, i.e. to NEAFC, every six hours. The Secretariat report indicates that there is a need for internal coordination on catch data.

The Russian Federation has not experienced problems with X.25 and automatic transmission to the NEAFC database. There are some problems in reporting catches of regulated and non-regulated species. Russian inspection platforms in the NEAFC area are still not implemented, but Russian inspectors participate on other platforms.

EU-Germany uses X.25 without problems.

EU-Denmark - hail reports are now sent by e-mail, and will hopefully be implemented automatically via X.25 next year. They consider it necessary to introduce software to handle data so manual intervention is unnecessary.

Information to the inspection platforms is not easily forthcoming, time is wasted and the NEAFC database does not give a complete picture of vessels present in the area. A return message does not guarantee that a message is correct and available. The record number does not solve the problem either.

EU-Sweden uses X.25 and corrections by e-mail. It had some problems in getting fishermen to report adequately. Software for electronic communication with inspection platforms will be established this winter.

EU-Spain. POS reported with X.25, X.400 would be in place in the future. They agreed with the analysis of their problems in the Secretariat's paper. They have experienced some problems receiving the correct information from captains. Annex X,XI messages are already sent via X.25

Denmark-Greenland uses X.25 for POS messages directly from fishing vessels, AUT not automated yet. There is a lack of proper software for fishermen to report automatically and a lack of understanding by fishing masters. Greenland is not using RET messages, and the evidence provided by Norway and the Secretariat shows big problems with that message. Nobody has really come up with a solution.

Denmark-Faroe Islands. Satisfactory tracking system. The Secretariat's report shows that they are doing what they are supposed to do, but there is need to look into transmission problems.

EU-Ireland There is a problem in the authorisation procedure and also transmission to NEAFC. Return messages will be looked at in detail over the next weeks.

EU-Commission. X.400 used, but low volume of messages. X.25 used for monthly catch statistics, but there are still problems. It is not known where messages are lost; when no return is received the message is resent. There are errors in some messages received from Member States. The X.25 is still not connected to the database automatically. Return messages are planned for next month. Other messages will be implemented by the end of this year.

Iceland: Fully operational system, only Annex 5 message are sent by fax because they come from a different source. Some problems in communicating via X.25 especially the return of information. The system tracks 150 vessels. At present hourly messages are filtered, so reporting to NEAFC is at six hourly intervals. Some new communication methods are being tested under the agreement with Norway and there are trials with Russia and Greenland. They have invited other parties to participate in the development of software for fishing vessels. They suggested that the Secretariat should perhaps be the clearinghouse for such software. There have been improvements in the costs of transmission. Iceland is modifying logs for inspection platforms to make it possible to give more accurate information on the Icelandic inspection presence. All Icelandic vessels are tracked for safety purposes. Norway asked if Iceland used return messages. Iceland said that they used them manually, but they intended to have them handled automatically by the system.

EU-UK Reporting six hourly, but there is no list of vessels yet because there has been a problem with call sign records. Format problems will also be dealt with. They shared doubts about the usefulness of the acknowledgment messages and the comments by EU-Denmark

about data for inspection platforms, but considered the answer was the automated retrieval of data for inspection purposes.

EU-Netherlands acknowledged the report by the Secretariat on performance, but thought that the situation may not be that bad. There were possibilities of direct links with the Secretariat.

The review by communication partners identified several problems.

There is still work to be done by Contracting Parties on bringing their communication systems in line with the requirements of the Scheme. The Scheme defines certain requirements, but does not answer all the matters arising. One is the handling of return messages. This could be addressed in a non-legal document. Non-legal documents should describe procedures and ways to deal with matters not prescribed by the Scheme. This is a task for the Ad Hoc Working Group and PECCOE in accordance with their mandates.

Problems to be discussed:

1. Communication protocols
2. Return messages. Here we have to make a distinction between VMS data and other reported data. The messages are of differing importance. The software for handling messages automatically by masters is also an item.
3. What information should be made available to inspection platforms

The Ad Hoc Working Group will discuss technical problems, while PECCOE would look into the legal ramifications.

Communication protocols

A number of Contracting Parties have been approached by service providers, which want to give up X.25. There are better and more convenient Internet based solutions, which are cheaper and give the same security. Internet is a proper alternative. TCP/IP protocols and virtual Internet are strong alternatives to X.25.

In a paper tabled at the meeting three alternatives were reviewed. The protocol with most promise seemed to be the HTTP(S) protocol, which is cheap, secure and has wide commercial applications. There was general consensus that alternative protocols should be investigated, but it should be noted that heavy investment has been made in X.25.

It was felt that the system should be able to accommodate messages under various protocols and that the Secretariat should be able to handle protocols other than HTTP (and X.25 and X.400). The time scale for testing new protocols would be one to one and a half years. It was hoped that some Contracting Parties would take it upon themselves to test new protocols and their security in cooperation with the Secretariat.

It was noted that most Parties seemed to use X.25 links without problems. The extra costs of the Secretariat running parallel systems should also be addressed.

Iceland thought we should consider that the X.25 system is costly, and most providers are trying to stop it or offer solutions on the Internet. The EU-Commission thought we should obtain information from providers as to how long they would provide X.25 services. We have

also to consider the efficiency of possible new protocols in delivering messages. Portugal noted that the problem is not the protocol, but the support lines to the protocols.

In conclusion, the Group agreed that it should seek a mandate from the NEAFC Commission to investigate alternative protocols and their merits with regard to efficiency of transmission, costs, aspects of confidentiality and security and how the NEAFC Secretariat could handle a flexible system allowing several protocols. The item should be kept on the agenda of the next meeting of the Ad Hoc WG.

Return messages.

Opinions on the importance of acknowledgment procedures and especially of return messages and sequential numbering of messages varied. Some Parties did not see any advantage in acknowledgement procedures, while others thought they were simple and effective control measures and a prerequisite for automation. The differing importance of messages was mentioned and the difference between communications between fishing vessels and the system, and FMCs and the system.

Information made available to the inspection platforms

Software for fishing vessel and automatic computer created messages should be investigated as it may alleviate some of the problems experienced

Iceland and Norway have some experience of this type of software. There was a general feeling that the Secretariat should play a role in coordinating the development of such software. The item will be kept on the agenda for the next meeting and the Secretariat will receive a description from Iceland, which can be distributed. It was hoped that something could be done before the next meeting of the Ad Hoc Group. It was noted that such software is of importance for inspectors and captains alike.

6. Identification of Actions Required to Reduce the Secretariat's Workload and Guarantee Data Exchange with Contracting Parties Pursuant to "the Scheme"

The key question is how long the Secretariat will be expected to handle messages manually. There has been a downward trend in the number of these messages, which can be expected to continue. It was noted that we still have a problem providing inspection vessels with reliable data.

It was agreed that there should be a clear aim to relieve the Secretariat of the task of accommodating data, which are not sent in accordance with the Scheme. The need to enter large volumes of data manually had delayed other priorities in the Secretariat. It is costly if an expensive inspection platform enters the NEAFC area and does not receive the appropriate data from the NEAFC database. We may have to set a deadline for CPs to comply with the Scheme if we want to achieve the objective of having a database that offers real time information to inspection services.

It was suggested that information on notification, inspection presence etc should be made available in a non-public website. The Secretariat indicated that they favoured a secure place in

the website, which is regularly updated from the database without opening the database to others.

In conclusion, it was agreed to take stock at the next meeting of the Ad Hoc Working Group on progress in software for fishing masters. Further discussions on a non-public website with information for inspection services will be based on a document listing the information which we want to be made available, taking confidentiality requirements into account. The Secretariat will coordinate the drafting of this document. The need to design the website technically so there are no problems for inspection craft to access it should also be borne in mind. Recent upgrading of the Secretariat's software had made the NEAFC system ready to go in this direction. Costs would mostly relate to the design of the website.

The Secretariat raised the question of using the database for scientific purposes. The Council Meeting of ICES in 2000 had adopted a resolution asking its General Secretary to approach NEAFC on the matter. This request had not yet been presented to the NEAFC Commission. The point was made that ICES could draw on national laboratories or NEAFC could discuss the matter with ICES and ask them to identify the needs of scientists. This information could then be processed from the database without, however, disclosing the identity of vessels.

A proposal for a new message from Norway

The proposal is presented in the PECCOE document *NEAFC PE 02/04* and was introduced by Norway. The proposal had been circulated to CPs in advance of the meeting. Current procedures for cancelling and correcting messages were explained. The Secretariat informed the meeting that the number of corrections was around 100 a year. However, it felt that that better quality control of messages would increase this number dramatically.

The Group drew no conclusions. Participants were generally hesitant about introducing a new message and felt the matter should be discussed in PECCOE.

7. Report to the 20th Annual Meeting of NEAFC

The report from the ad Working Group will be submitted to the 20th Annual Meeting of NEAFC under agenda item 10.

8. Date and Place of Next Meeting

It was suggested that a proposal should be made to the Commission for a meeting to be held before 1 April 2002. Final dates will be agreed between the Chairman, Jacques Verborgh, and the Secretariat.

9. Any Other Business

There being no other business, the Chairman closed the meeting at 16:30.