PERMANENT COMMITTEE ON MANAGEMENT AND SCIENCE (PECMS)  
OF THE NORTH-EAST ATLANTIC FISHERIES COMMISSION  

1-2 October 2015 at NEAFC Headquarters, London  

Draft report

1. Opening of the meeting  
The Chair, Evgeny Shamray, the Russian Federation, opened the meeting and welcomed the delegates. All Contracting Parties were represented at the meeting.

2. Adoption of the agenda and appointment of rapporteur  
The agenda was adopted in the form circulated before the meeting. The Secretary was appointed as rapporteur.

3. Cooperation with ICES  

   1. Review of advice from ICES  
A representative of the ICES Secretariat, Henrik Sparholt made a presentation on the format of the scientific advice from ICES and on the advice for individual fish stocks. He also noted that ICES had been unable to provide all the advice requested, with the special request regarding blue whiting being left unanswered due to unforeseen issues regarding the uncertainty in the advice which had to be addressed first.

   The Contracting Parties asked several questions for clarification and there was a discussion on several issues related to the advice. This included a discussion on the categorisation of stocks on the basis of the available data; the status and trends of the main fish stocks; the way in which estimated discards are accounted for in the advice; the level of uncertainty in the advice for specific stocks; the use of catch per unit effort as an indicator of stock status; the relevance of the IUCN red list; and, the importance of ICES receiving redfish data by depth.

   There was a discussion on the need to have an in-depth presentation by ICES of the scientific advice at the NEAFC Annual Meetings. It was noted that the advice is presented to PECMAS and then to the coastal State meetings before it is presented to the Annual Meeting. It was suggested that it might be sufficient to have a short overview of the advice at the Annual Meeting regarding the fish stocks that have already been presented in detail to both PECMAS and coastal State meetings. ICES representatives would also be available at the Annual Meeting to answer any questions that Contracting Parties may have regarding the advice.
A representative of ICES, Mark Tasker (Vice Chair of the ICES Advisory Committee), made a presentation of the ICES advice relating to area management and the protection of vulnerable marine ecosystems (VMEs). He noted, and welcomed, that the recurring request for advice from ICES in this context had been amended at the 2014 Annual Meeting.

The ICES representative noted that the three surveys that had recently been conducted had further confirmed the previous findings regarding the occurrence of VMEs on and around the Rockall Bank. He noted that the ICES VME database now included around 9,000 records of VMEs, and the positive response to a recent data call resulted in the expectation that they would exceed 10,000 records in the next year.

The ICES representative pointed out that there was no new advice for area management this year, but that previous advice was still in place. NEAFC had already adopted area closures for all the areas advised by ICES, apart from the Josephine Seamount.

The ICES representative noted that the VME data provided to ICES by NEAFC had several indications of bottom fisheries in areas where they are not authorised. It was noted that in most cases this was the result of vessels being notified as using different fishing gear than they were using in the cases in question. For example, vessels were registered as using bottom fishing gear when they were in fact engaging in pelagic trawling for pelagic redfish in the Irminger Sea. In other cases, vessels could be drifting, moving from one area to another, or engaging in activities other than fishing while in the relevant area.

It was noted that it would require a substantial effort for ICES to carefully go through the data to identify the actual fishing gear likely to be used in each case or to identify any other likely activity. It was also noted that efforts had already been made to improve this situation, but these had not yet been fully successful. The eventual move to an ERS reporting system, which is being discussed in PECCOE, is expected to contribute to improving this situation.

Regardless of reasons such as those given above, for vessels being shown by the data as bottom fishing in areas where such fishing is not authorised, it was noted that in some cases it was likely that there was in fact unauthorised bottom fishing. It was pointed out that the 2014 Annual Meeting had identified that such fishing seemed to be taking place, and that the automatic flagging to inspection agencies did not appear to be as effective as had been thought. It was further noted that PECCOE had addressed this as a matter of priority, and that there were indications that there was already significant improvement in this context in 2015. The data that ICES had analysed had been from 2014.

It was noted that ICES had not focused much on the Regulatory Area in the Barents Sea, and that records of VMEs were not common there. The representative of ICES stated that he would bring the need to focus further this part of the Regulatory Area to the attention of the relevant ICES Working Group.

2. Formulation of requests for advice from ICES

Pursuant to discussions under agenda item 5.2, it was agreed to propose to the NEAFC Commission that the following non-recurring request for advice be made to ICES:

Pursuant to the Interim guidelines on management of deep-sea species, adopted at the 2014 NEAFC Annual Meeting, ICES is requested to 1) evaluate the provisional categorisation of deep-sea species adopted by PECMAS (PECMAS document
Additionally pursuant to discussions under agenda item 5.2, it was agreed to propose to the NEAFC Commission that the following addition be made to the recurring request for advice to ICES:

Pursuant to the *Interim guidelines on management of deep-sea species*, adopted at the 2014 NEAFC Annual Meeting, the following phrase shall be added to the recurring request text, Ch. 2.1:

In the advice for deep-sea stocks ICES shall also provide information on the observed distribution of catches between the NEAFC Regulatory Area and EEZs, in addition to the distribution by the ICES statistical areas at the finest resolution available. ICES shall also alert NEAFC to new and expanding fisheries, even if no stock-specific advice can be provided.

For both proposed requests, it was noted that the exact wording might be revisited at the Annual Meeting.

3. Other

It was noted that ICES had contacted NEAFC to ascertain if it would be acceptable to postpone the release in 2016 of the advice for widely distributed stocks by approximately one week, to 7 October 2016. This would be done to give more time for the ICES Expert Group to work on the data from the surveys that end just shortly before the meeting.

There was a discussion on the suggestion from ICES, where it was noted that there was a very tight timeframe to digest the advice and formulate conservation and management measures. The delay would have serious implications for that work, both at PECMAS and among the coastal States.

It was agreed to request the Secretary to inform ICES that there would be significant problems if NEAFC agreed with the suggested postponement, and that it would therefore be appropriate for the dates for the release of the advice to remain as they have been. It was noted that there had been an ICES representative present during the discussion on this issue, and that he would report back to ICES in more detail on the points that had been raised in this context at the PECMAS meeting.

4. Protection of vulnerable marine ecosystems

1. Formulation of proposals to the Annual Meeting

No proposals were made for PECMAS to make new proposals to the Annual Meeting.

2. Other

The Chair reminded the Contracting Parties that this year, PECMAS had already dealt with two proposals for exploratory bottom fisheries in the Regulatory area. A third one, circulated on 8 July as HOD letter 15/52, was still outstanding and needed to be addressed at this meeting.

He noted that, as for the previous two proposals, the task for PECMAS was to make an assessment of the proposal and provide advice to the Commission as to whether the proposed exploratory bottom fishing should be approved, or whether it would have significant adverse impacts on VMEs. No other issues should be considered by PECMAS.
The Chair asked if any Contracting Party had a position that the proposed bottom fishing would have significant adverse impacts on VMEs. No Contracting Party expressed such a position.

**It was agreed** to advise the Commission that the proposal should be approved, with a letter that would use the same wording as the previous two letters of advice regarding such proposals. The Secretary was requested to send such a letter following the conclusion of the meeting.

It was noted that in Articles 7.2 and 7.3 of the Recommendation on the protection of VMEs, there are references to “guidance developed by ICES” and “procedures and standards developed by PECMAS” respectively. Such guidance, procedures and standards had not yet been developed. PECMAS was therefore dealing with proposals for exploratory bottom fisheries on a somewhat ad hoc basis.

There were lengthy discussions on this, where several points were made. The importance of involvement by ICES in the assessment of proposals for exploratory bottom fisheries was stressed by some Contracting Parties, while it was generally acknowledged that any procedure must fit within the overall 3-month-period established by the Recommendation. The representative of ICES stated that it should be possible to set clear guidelines for input from ICES that would be considered as a “technical service” rather than full advice, and should not take overly long to complete. There would therefore be a possibility of having ICES assess, within the necessary time-limits, the likelihood of VME presence in the areas where the proposed exploratory bottom fishing will take place.

Following lengthy discussions, it **was agreed** that the most appropriate way forward would be for PECMAS to develop its own procedures and standards first, as required pursuant to Article 7.3 of the Recommendation. Following that, a request could be made for ICES to provide guidance pursuant to Article 7.2. The wording of that request would build on the conclusion regarding the PECMAS procedures and standards.

Norway volunteered to make an initial draft of these procedures and standards and present it to PECMAS. This would be ready in time for the next PECMAS meeting. Norway would also make an effort to have this ready already at the 2015 Annual Meeting. PECMAS would meet in the margins of that meeting to finalise the request for advice to ICES, and if there was agreement in principle on the draft guidelines and standards it might be possible to formulate a request to ICES regarding guidance pursuant to Article 7.2 already at that meeting.

5. **Management of deep sea species**

   1. **Ad hoc working group on deep sea species**

   The Chair of the ad hoc Working Group, Odd Aksel Bergstad, Norway, presented his report, document PECMAS 2015-01-03. He explained that the group had not yet received all the data required to do its work. Data was still missing from both Greenland and the EU. Given the extent of their fisheries, the EU data was particularly important and it served little purpose to carry out the exercise without it.

   Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) clarified that the reason Greenland had not submitted any data was that Greenland had no data to submit in this context. The chair of the ad hoc Working Group welcomed this clarification.

   The EU stated that they would endeavour to make their data available as soon as possible.
It was agreed that the ad hoc Working Group could not carry out its work until all the relevant data had been submitted. No meetings of the group would therefore be planned until the data had been received.

It was agreed to present the report from the Chair of the ad hoc Working Group to the Annual Meeting, along with the information that Greenland had no relevant data to submit in addition to any information received from the EU following the PECMAS meeting regarding when they expected to submit their data.

2. Formulation of proposals to the Annual Meeting

Norway presented document PECMAS 2015-01-07, regarding the categorisation of deep sea species. The document includes a proposal for an interim categorisation of deep sea fish stocks, pursuant to the interim guidelines on management of deep-sea species, which were adopted at the 2014 Annual Meeting.

Following lengthy discussions, it was agreed to propose to the NEAFC Commission to adopt the interim categorisation as set out in document PECMAS 2015-01-07.

It was also agreed to propose to the NEAFC Commission to make one non-recurring request for advice from ICES in this context, and one addition to the recurring advice. These proposals are reported under agenda item 3.2.

It was noted that it was essential to receive information on the extent to which deep sea fisheries take place within national jurisdiction and within the Regulatory Area. Absence of such information would make it impossible to determine whether it was relevant to adopt NEAFC measures for the relevant species. Inclusion of such information in the ICES advice was therefore important for the work of PECMAS in this context.

Norway presented two proposals regarding the management of grenadiers in the Regulatory Area, documents PECMAS 2015-01-08 and PECMAS 2015-01-09. The EU pointed out that they already had conservation and management measures in force for its vessels for the years 2015 and 2016, and could not support the proposals as they were not fully consistent with what they already had in place. Other Contracting Parties pointed out that the EU measures only applied to EU vessels and that these were fisheries that took place in the Regulatory Area.

After some discussion, it became clear that there was no consensus on forwarding either of the Norwegian proposals on grenadiers to the NEAFC Commission as PECMAS proposals.

The Russian Federation presented two proposals regarding general measures for the conservation and management of deep sea species, documents PECMAS 2015-01-15 and PECMAS 2015-01-16. The two proposals presented two different options regarding observer programmes in these fisheries.

It was noted that the current general measures regarding deep sea species were inadequate, and that the adoption of the guidelines in 2014 and the establishment of the ad hoc Working Group were efforts to improve NEAFC’s management of deep sea species.

However, it was noted that the issue of possible observer programmes was among the issues being discussed at the NEAFC Extraordinary Meeting, the resumed session of which would be the following week. Some Contracting Parties considered it inappropriate to prejudge the conclusion of
the Extraordinary Meeting on this issue by making any proposal on observer programmes. It was also noted that the proposal had been tabled on the second day of the PECMAS meeting, and the Contracting Parties had not had an opportunity to study it.

After some discussion, it became clear that there was no consensus on forwarding either of the Russian proposals on general measures for deep sea species to the NEAFC Commission as PECMAS proposals.

3. Other
No point was raised under this agenda item.

6. Marine litter
Norway pointed out that at the 2014 Annual Meeting they had initiated that NEAFC cooperate with OSPAR on marine litter issues. A proposal in this had been adopted at that meeting, and subsequently a questionnaire had been circulated. All Contracting Parties had now submitted their response to the questionnaire, although the submission of Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) so far only covered the Faroe Islands.

It was noted that the responses received represented significant progress in NEAFC’s work on this issue. It was also noted that the intention was to work closely with OSPAR on this issue.

It was agreed to send the responses received from the Contracting Parties to the questionnaire to OSPAR, so that they would contribute to the work that is also on-going in OSPAR on these issues. The Secretary was requested to send this at his earliest convenience.

It was also agreed to make the responses available as an Annual Meeting document. The Secretary was requested to prepare that document, and include as a cover letter for that document a short summary of the discussions that had taken place within PECMAS.

7. Cooperation with OSPAR

1. Implementation of the collective arrangement
It was noted that OSPAR had recently made its submission for Annex 1 of the collective arrangement, and that editorial work was being finalised for the completed version of the collective arrangement with all annexes.

It was noted that the first meeting under the collective arrangement had been held earlier in 2015. It was also noted that organisation for the second meeting under the collective arrangement were already underway. The plan is for Norway to host the meeting on 20-21 April 2016 in Svalbard, with delegates arriving in Svalbard on 20 April and leaving on 22 April.

There was a discussion on the progress regarding bringing the International Maritime Organization and the International Seabed Authority into the collective arrangements. Efforts towards that end will continue.

Contracting Parties were encouraged to consider what issues NEAFC might bring to the attention of OSPAR under the collective arrangement. These would be issues that are relevant to fisheries, but any action on which would be outside the legal competence of NEAFC. This could for example
include concerns over specific pollutants that would have the potential to affect fisheries or fish products.

It was noted that the first meeting under the collective arrangement had focused to some extent on procedures and the format of future meetings. However, for future meetings, it was noted that the aim would be to enter into more substantive discussions. It was noted in that context that participation of representatives of the Contracting Parties would be beneficial for future meetings under the collective arrangement. Contacting Parties were encouraged to consider being represented at the 2016 meeting in Svalbard.

2. **Consideration of other issues relating to cooperation between NEAFC and OSPAR**

3. **Session with OSPAR**

The Chair welcomed Emily Corcoran, from the OSPAR Secretariat.

The two Secretariats pointed out that they have firmly established good cooperation that is based on both formal and informal communications.

There was a discussion on the implementation of the collective arrangement, as reported under agenda item 7.1.

It was noted that NEAFC and OSPAR had collectively done much work regarding EBSAs, but that there continued to be a situation where no further progress could be made at this time.

The representative of OSPAR raised the issue of OSPAR conducting an exercise of creating pressure maps showing cumulative pressure from various activities, including bottom fishing. She noted in that context that ICES was not currently able to use the VMS and catch data provided to them by NEAFC for the purpose of providing OSPAR with advice. ICES could only use the data to provide NEAFC with advice. She asked about the possibility of ICES being authorised to use the data to provide advice that would contribute to this exercise.

There were discussions on this issue, where it was *inter alia* pointed out that the NEAFC data would only cover the Regulatory Area, therefore ICES would need to get information from ICES members in any case. It was also pointed out that in the past the issue of using the VMS data had been very sensitive. PECMAS did not reach any firm conclusion on this issue and therefore there was no proposal made to the Annual Meeting in this context.

8. **Information regarding relevant international initiatives**

The Secretary informed the Contracting Parties of developments regarding a few processes that are relevant to NEAFC.

9. **Any other business**

The Chair presented a letter from the Working Group on Fisheries Statistics. The group had sent some questions to PECMAS in 2014, relating to corrections of the 3-alpha species codes used in NEAFC. PECMAS had responded to the questions, and the current letter from the working group explained that they had formulated a proposal to the Annual Meeting building on the response from PECMAS.
The letter further stated that unless PECMAS objected before 10 October 2015, the proposal would be formally submitted as a proposal to the Annual Meeting.

It was noted that the working group’s proposal had taken account of the input from PECMAS. **It was agreed** that PECMAS would not raise any objection to the Working Group on Fisheries Statistics submitting the proposal to the Annual Meeting. The Secretary was requested to inform the working group of this.

10. **Report of the meeting**
The draft report was circulated on 5 October 2015. The final report was adopted through correspondence on 16 October 2015.

11. **Closing of the meeting**
The Chair thanked all the participants for a fruitful meeting and wished everyone a safe journey home. He then closed the meeting.