

## ACOM Chair's – 2017 Annual Progress Report

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## 1 Summary

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1. The advisory plan for 2017 involves advice on fishing opportunities for approximately 207 stocks, release of 2 ecosystem and 2 fisheries overviews, responses to 3 recurring requests for advice on ecosystem impacts of fishing activities and 18 special requests.
2. The process has until primo October involved 37 advice drafting groups and 29 Web-Conferences were planned to approve the advice. 12 of the Web-Conferences were cancelled because no substantial comments on the draft advice were received and the advices were adopted without a Web-Conference.
3. ICES has in 2017 until primo October been requested to present the advice at 20 meetings in 2017.
4. In general data has been delivered within the deadlines in 2017 and no major failures has been observed with the exception of VMS data and data on catches by zone (inside and outside EEZ's) where a couple of countries still have difficulties in delivering.
5. Expert Groups have in general been addressed their ToRs of relevance for the advisory process.
6. The Secretariat has used substantial resources in implementing the review system. It has in recent years been increasingly difficult to find experts willing to act as reviewer.
7. ACOM's involvement in drafting and approving advice has improved in 2017 compared to 2016. However, the participation is still skew in favor of fisheries advice with limited involvement of a large part of ACOM in ecosystem advice requests.
8. Whereas the current advisory structure has proven suitable for addressing fisheries requests, it has been less well-suited for environmental and ecosystem requests. The limited involvement of a large part of ACOM in ecosystem advice requests puts a question mark on ACOM's ability to address these requests. ACOM has therefore discussed possible changes to the Committee structure and working procedure. The background document for the discussion is annexed to this report.

ACOM agreed to maintain the current structure of one member per country but with a changed set of skills and background requirements for national ACOM members, and with a change in internal ACOM working procedures to support this change.

This includes changes to the profile of ACOM members in a way that members should have skills in science communication and strategic issues, rather than in stock assessment. ACOM also believes it is important that the

members actively coordinate the national contribution and involvement in the advisory process.

ACOM will review and revise its working procedure at the Committee's meeting in November with the aim of strengthening the Committee's ability to address non-fisheries requests.

9. ACOM agreed at the December 2016 meeting on a workplan for 2017 with the following points:
  - a) Frequency of assessments. Procedures and practices to reduce the frequency of assessments.
  - b) Reopening. Adjustment of the reopening procedure to produce better advice, reduce workload.
  - c) Technical guidelines. Continue the development of guidelines including a checklist, to avoid errors that are increasing in our assessments and advice.
  - d) Introduction to the advice. Revision to be available by June 2017.
  - e) Ecosystem advice. Development of a framework for ecosystem advice.
  - f) Fisheries overviews. Finalise and release the agreed fisheries overviews.
  - g) Ecosystem overviews. Implement the agreed update and review plan.
  - h) Non-fisheries advice.

Work is progressing on all points with the exception of point c) Technical guidelines and point d) Introduction to the advice.

In total 13 technical guidelines out of the 25 guidelines agreed by ACOM in 2014 have now been published. There has been little progress in finalizing the remaining guidelines. A plan for finalizing the guidelines will be presented at the November 2017 ACOM meeting.

The leadership has not had time to work on the introduction during the first half of 2017 and a revised version will not be available for ACOM approval until the November 2017 meeting.

On point f) Fisheries overviews, the progress has been less than planned. ACOM agreed in November 2016 to aim at releasing four overviews early 2017 (Baltic Sea, Celtic Seas, North Sea and Norwegian and Barents Seas). By September 2017 fisheries overviews have been published for the Baltic Sea and the Greater North Sea ecoregions. To continue the development of fisheries overviews a better support from ICES Member Countries in the form of allocation of resources to the work is required.

Regarding point h see point 8 above.

## 2 Overview of the advisory process and advice provided in 2017 until September

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### 2.1 Advice provided by ICES

The advice provided by ICES in period 2014 to 2017 is shown in table 1.

The decline during the period in number of advice on fishing opportunities is due to an increase in the number of stocks for which ICES provided biennial or more advice.

The low number of special requests in 2015 is partly due to a delay in the signing of the AA with the EU which meant that all EU special requests were delayed by more than half a year.

Advice type\year	2014	2015	2016	2017
Fishing opportunity	252	225	222	207
Special requests and other advice	19	14	29	25
Technical services	9	7	4	2

Table 1. Number of advice by type issued by ICES in the period 2014 to 2017.

### 2.2 Recurring requests for advice

ICES advisory plan for 2017 involves advice on fishing opportunities for 207 stocks.

Area	Number of stocks for which advice will provided in 2017
Iceland and East Greenland	12
Barents Sea	8
Faroe Plateau	3
Celtic Sea and West of Scotland	46

North Sea, Eastern Channel, Skagerrak and Kattegat	45
Bay of Biscay and Atlantic Iberian Waters	26
Baltic Sea	18
Widely distributed and migratory stocks	29

Table 2. Number of recurring advice on fishing opportunities planned for 2017 by area.

In addition to the recurring advice on fishing opportunities ICES has issued two Ecosystem Overviews, two Fisheries Overviews and providing advice in response to recurring requests on ecosystem impacts of fisheries to:

**EU Commission:**

- Bycatch of small cetaceans and other marine animals;
- Impact of fisheries on other components of the ecosystem;

**NEAFC:**

- Vulnerable deep-water habitats in the NEAFC Regulatory Area

### 2.3 Special requests

ICES has by mid-October accepted 18 special requests that have or will be addressed in 2017:

**EU:**

- Effects of lifting the “sprat box”
- Distributional shifts in fish stocks
- Fisheries related anthropogenic impacts on silver eel
- $F_{MSY}$  ranges for whiting in the North Sea and Eastern Channel
- In-year advice on haddock (*Melanogrammus aeglefinus*) in Division 7.a (Irish Sea)
- In-year advice on Anchovy (*Engraulis encrasicolus*) in Division 9.a (Atlantic Iberian waters)
- Review the advice for alfonsinos/golden eye perch (*Beryx* spp.) in the Northeast Atlantic
- Review the advice for blackspot (= red) seabream (*Pagellus bogaraveo*) in Subarea 10 (Azores grounds)
- Risk to the stock of dab and flounder of having no catch limits
- Evaluation of the management plan for Iberian sardine
- Guidance on development of operational methods for the evaluation of the MSFD criterion D3.3, Phase 2
- Indicators for assessing pressure and impact on the seafloor from bottom-contacting fishing - trade-offs between benthic impact and landings/value

**EU, Faroe Islands, Iceland and Norway**

- Evaluation of long-term management plan for mackerel

#### **Iceland:**

- Evaluate the harvest control rule for Ling in Division 5.a
- Evaluate the harvest control rule for tusk in Subarea 14 and Division 5.a
- Evaluation of harvest control rules for a management plan for Icelandic summer-spawning herring (Division 5.a)

#### **NASCO:**

- Future impacts of climate change on salmon stock dynamics

#### **NEAFC**

- Appropriateness of NEAFC bottom fishing closures

### **2.4 Technical services**

HELCOM - Technical Service on fishing abrasion maps

OSPAR - Technical Service on fishing abrasion maps

## **3 Review of advisory process in 2017**

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### **3.1 Data**

In general data has been delivered within the deadlines in 2017 and no major failures have been observed with the exception of VMS data and data on catches by zone (inside and outside EEZ's) where a couple of countries did not deliver or delivered incomplete data.

### **3.2 Expert Groups**

The attendance of Expert Groups dealing with advisory ToRs seems in general to have been satisfactory and the groups have with a few exceptions addressed their advisory ToRs.

### **3.3 Reviews**

The advisory process involves peer review of responses to special requests, benchmark results and substantial changes to methods and data used in an advice. ICES has 20 - 30 advice review groups and 10 – 15 benchmark review groups per year. The difficulties observed in recent years to find experts willing to act as reviewer have continued in 2017.

The internal audit system implemented for stock assessment groups has not been reviewed. However, it seems that the quality of the audits varies highly both within and between expert groups.

15 corrections to advice have been issued in 2017 until primo October. All minor corrections with no impact on the advice.

### 3.4 Advice Drafting Groups.

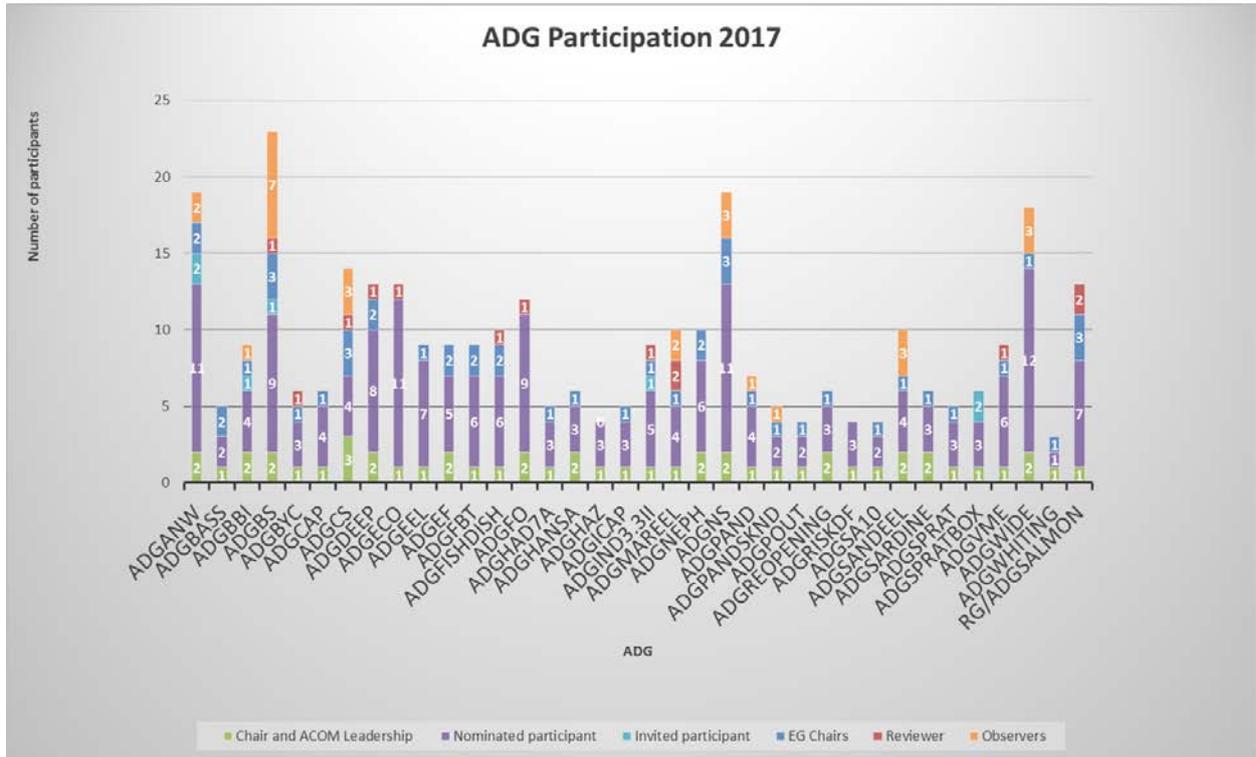


Figure 1. In 2017 until primo October 37 Advice Drafting Groups have met.

The number of participants in the ADGs varied between 3 and 23. Attendance by participants nominated by ACOM national members varied from 1 to 12. The attendance by national nominated members was less than three in 5 of the 37 ADGs.

The participation in ADGs has improved compared to last year and has in general been satisfactory.

Especially for non-fisheries ADGs there have been a number of cases, where national nominated members withdrew a few days before the start of the ADG with reference to that they were not aware of having been nominated or had not planned to attend.

There has in 2017 been a number of cases where ACOM agreed procedures or rules were questioned by ACOM members during ADGs making it difficult to implement the ACOM decisions.

### 3.5 ACOM Advice Web-Conferences.

The participation in ACOM advice approval Web-Conferences in 2017 until primo October is shown in Figure 2. A total of 29 Web-Conferences were planned for the period. 12 out of them were canceled because no substantial comments on the draft advice were received and the advices were adopted without a Web-Conference being held.

On average 50% of ICES Member Countries were represented at a Web-Conference, 23% did not attend but approved the advice beforehand and 27% did not respond to the Web-Conferences invitation.

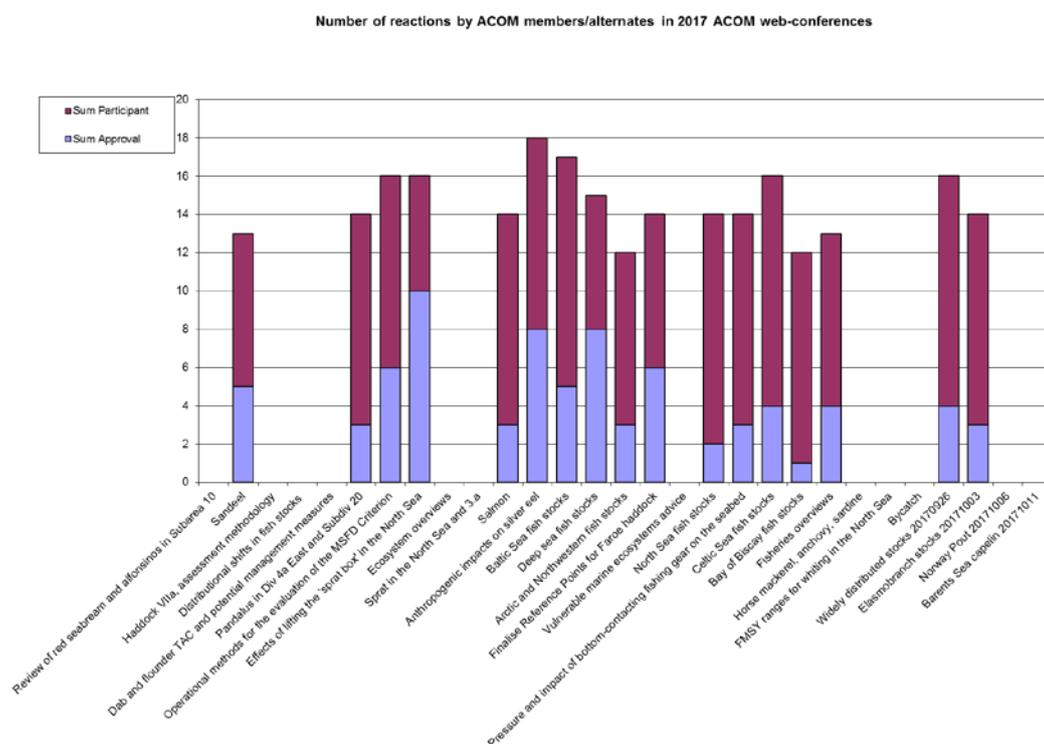


Figure 2 Number of ACOM members participating in advice Web-Conferences or approved the advice before the Web-Conference in 2017 until primo October. In cases where no participation is reported the Web-Conference was canceled because no substantial comments to the advice were received

### 3.6 Presentation of advice

The Administrative Agreement (AA) with EU, and the MoUs with Norway, NEAFC and NASCO ICES include commitments for ICES to present, if requested, the advice at meetings organized by the clients. In addition the leadership has been requested to give presentations at Coastal State meetings, regional meetings and conferences. Table 2 provides an overview of presentations provided in or planned for 2017.

Table 2. Presentations of advice by ICES in 2017.

Organisation/meeting	Venue	Date	Presenter
DG MARE. ICES advisory process	Brussels	7 March	Lotte Worsøe Clausen
EFCA. Joint Workshop BALTFISH / BSAC / EFCA on Monitoring,	Hamburg	8 March	Eskild Kirkegaard

Control and Enforcement of the Landing Obligation			
OSPAR HASEC, interim Advice on hazardous substances	Stockholm	28 – 31 March	Mark Tasker
BalticAC. Advice on Baltic stocks	Klaipeda	7-8 June	Eskild Kirkegaard
NASCO, Annual meeting	Varberg, Sweden	6 - 8 June	Gérald Chaput
BaltFish. Advice on Baltic stocks	Berlin	29 June	Eskild Kirkegaard
NWWAC. Advice on North Western Waters stocks.	Edinburgh	4 July	Ghislain Chouinard
DG MARE. Informal meeting on ICES advice for 2018.	Brussels	6 July	Eskild Kirkegaard
PelAC. Advice on herring stocks. Advice on other pelagic stocks	Den Haag Den Haag	11 July 4 October	Ghislain Chouinard Carmen Fernandez
NSAC. Advice on North Sea stocks.	Edinburg	13 July	Ghislain Chouinard
BaltFish. Advice on Baltic stocks	Copenhagen	30 August	Lotte Worsøe Clausen
BaltFish. ICES framework for advice on fishing opportunities	Copenhagen	31 August	Eskild Kirkegaard
DG MARE. Seminar on state of stocks in EU Waters.	Brussels	26 Sept.	Eskild Kirkegaard
EU Council. Stock advice for 2018.	Brussels	28 Sept.	Eskild Kirkegaard
NEAFC, PECMAS. Advice to NEAFC. Annual Meeting, Advice to NEAFC	London London	3 - 4 Oct. 13 - 14 Nov.	David Miller and Eskild Kirkegaard; Eskild Kirkegaard and Mark Tasker
Coastal State meeting on mackerel	London	10 October	Eskild Kirkegaard
Coastal State meeting on blue whiting	London	16 October	Carmen Fernandez

## 4 MIRIA and MIACO

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The annual meeting with the recipients of ICES advice took place 17<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> January 2017 with the participation of EU, NEAFC, OSPAR, Norway, Iceland, Greenland, Faroe Islands, France and Denmark.

The meeting with observers to ICES advisory work were organised back to back with the MIRIA meeting from 19<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> January. The meeting was attended by 32 observers representing 18 observer organisations.

The main aims of the meetings were to review ICES advisory work, and to inform and discuss with recipients and observers new developments in ICES advice.

The agendas for the two meetings were very similar, containing a mixture of information and discussion items including:

- 1) Errors in advice.
- 2) Involvement of stakeholders in ICES advisory process.
- 3) Ecosystem overviews.
- 4) Fisheries overviews.
- 5) MSY approach for category 3 and 4 stocks.
- 6) Workload.
  - a) Frequency of assessments.
  - b) Reopening of advice.
- 7) Management plans as basis for ICES advice.
- 8) ICES Advisory Work-plan 2017.

Both meetings were evaluated by the participants as very constructive, informative and important for the cooperation with ICES. It was agreed to hold similar meetings again in January 2018.

The discussions and conclusions of the meetings are presented by item below.

A separate two hours meeting with the EU Advisory Councils (ACs) took place on the 19<sup>th</sup> prior to the MIACO. This meeting mainly focused on the cooperation between ICES and the ACs including ICES presentation of the advice at AC meetings. There was a strong wish from the ACs to continue with the separate meeting between ICES and the ACs and it was agreed that the ACs should be active in planning the meeting. The 2018 meeting will therefore be organised by the Baltic AC secretariat and ICES.

## 5 WGCHAIRS

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WGCHAIRS met from 23<sup>rd</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> January 2017. Chairs of expert and steering groups contributing to ICES advisory work were invited. 33 chairs (2 by WebEX) participated in the meeting.

In addition to the items addressed at the November 2016 ACOM meeting the chairs meeting also discussed ecosystem based management and ICES advice, and data issues.

The discussion on ecosystem based management was aimed at informing the chairs about ICES approach to ecosystem based management and how the concept influence the work in different expert groups or may do it in the future.

The data item was a follow up on discussions at the 2016 chairs meeting and was used to inform the chairs on the current work to streamlining data management within ICES. As several chairs of Regional Coordination Groups under EU's data collection framework (DCF) attended WGCHAIRS it was possible to discuss data issues across data providers and data users.

The chairs meeting at the ASC in Riga identified a need for enhancing the communication between ICES groups. Discussions during the January meeting confirmed that most chairs thinks there is not enough information flow, or direct communication, between groups. In its current layout it is exceedingly difficult to get an overview of, and integrate, the work, with each group working in isolation. It was highlighted that there is a definite lack of feedback links and loops between the different groups. It was also stressed that, with Chairs changing every three years, successful cooperation between groups can't be dictated by interpersonal relationships.

The discussions clearly identified a need for improved communication and coordination.

Chairs of expert groups are central for ICES work whether science or advice. It is important that this is recognised by ICES and the chairs are given the necessary support to plan and run their groups work. One way of supporting the chairs is by providing a forum where they can exchange views and experiences.

WGCHAIRS is such a forum and ACOM and SCICOM have agreed that the January 2018 Chairs meeting should be for all expert groups within ICES. The experiences from this meeting will form the basis for ACOM/SCICOM decisions on future chairs meetings.

## **6 Review by MIRIA, MIACO and WGCHAIRS of ICES advisory services provided in 2016**

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### **6.1 MIRIA**

The recipients were very happy with the cooperation with ICES and the quality of the advice. All found ICES to provide high quality advice and commended the flexibility shown by ICES to address request with tight deadlines. The AA and MoUs and the request template have facilitated a continuous dialogue to specify the precise needs by clients enabling a timely and operational advice by ICES. It was underlined that ICES enables clients to have a clear separation between their policy responsibilities and the science basis and the independence of ICES was seen as crucial for the credibility of the advice.

Several Clients were pleased to see ICES involvement on aquaculture is being picked up again.

OSPAR pointed to the importance of the assistance provided by ICES on simplifying complex OSPAR reports as well as the technical services on data management. For ICES and OSPAR there is an element of rebuilding of trust

which need attention in 2017; both organizations are optimistic with off-set in a meeting held in December 2016.

A number of items for further discussions/improvements were identified by the recipients including:

- errors corrected after the advice have been released,
- ICES revision of reference points and how it affects already agreed management plans with detailed harvest control rules,
- information on catches by zone where ICES has not been able to fully address a request from NEAFC,
- mixed fisheries advice where clarity is needed,
- advice on 'minimize by-catch' where it was unclear if ICES were given zero catch advice or that by-catches were OK,
- communication – difficult to find information on ICES website and sharepoint. Wish was expressed to have a more active information policy.

## 6.2 MIACO

The general feedback from MIACO was very positive. ICES was commended for a very good job under difficult conditions. The Advisory Councils expressed satisfaction with the way the advice had been presented to the councils.

A number of issues/wishes were raised including:

- the advice on catch opportunities was found to be too “narrow” leaving no room for interpretation and flexibility in evaluation of stock status and catch opportunities,
- the best format of the advice was when the advice contained many options directly linked to the stock size,
- stocks should be looked at more individually instead of applying a standard MSY approach,
- the integrated ecosystem approach should be used when providing advice,
- too many errors in the advice - the quality control system should be improved,
- communication, difficult to find information on ICES website and sharepoint. Wish was expressed for ICES to have a more active information policy.

## 6.3 WGCHAIRS

The chairs discussed what went well or not so well in 2016, and how to improve.

Main issues discussed were:

- Old software. Support from secretariat to update software was requested,
- Easier access to DATRAS data was requested,
- Stakeholder involvement in expert groups and working procedures. It was recommended that the responsibilities of participants and what information could be circulated outside the groups during meetings was addressed at the beginning of meetings with the aim of having an agreed procedure,
- Role of advice drafting groups. Based on concrete examples concerns were expressed that advice drafting groups may change methods agreed

at expert group meetings. Current guidelines specifies that the expert group should be consulted before substantial changes are made to the draft advice prepared by an expert group,

- Errors in assessments and need for a more efficient audit system,
- Communication between data groups and assessment groups using the data was in general considered poor and inadequate. Should be given priority,
- Changes in ToRs. Big changes including new tasks for the expert groups are not received well. The chairs would rather send these important issues to be addressed at benchmarks,
- Recommendations – unclear what happens to recommendations that the expert groups make,
- Workload – solutions needed to better manage the workload, too many ToRs, last minute special requests, data availability,
- How to deal with different views within a working group. Several chairs were not aware of the guidelines to chairs including what to do if consensus cannot be reached,
- Information to the expert groups on feedbacks from the clients and stakeholders.

## **7 ACOM Workplan 2017**

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ACOM identified at the November 2016 meeting the following as priority area for the Committees strategic work in 2017:

- Frequency of assessments. Procedures and practices to reduce the frequency of assessments.
- Reopening. Adjustment of the reopening procedure to produce better advice, reduce workload.
- Technical guidelines. Continue the development of guidelines including a checklist, to avoid errors that are increasing in our assessments and advice.
- Introduction to the advice. Revision to be available by June 2017.
- Ecosystem advice. Development of a framework for ecosystem advice.
- Fisheries overviews. Finalise and release the agreed fisheries overviews.
- Ecosystem overviews. Implement the agreed update and review plan.
- Non-fisheries advice.

### **7.1 Frequency of assessments.**

ACOM, with inputs from expert group, identified at the 2016 November meeting category 1 stocks that could be candidates for less frequent assessments.

The list was presented to MIRIA with the aim of having a general discussion of the need for annual assessments and to MIACO and WGCHAIRS for information. It was underlined that advice on fishing opportunities might still be given on an annual basis taking into account the most recent developments in catches.

Observers were positive to prioritise the assessment work and focus the work on the important stocks and where assessment issues have been detected.

The clients were not prepared to provide feedback on the list at the meeting and it was agreed to follow up bilateral.

As a follow up the issue was on the agendas of meetings between ICES and DGMARE on 7<sup>th</sup> February and 22<sup>nd</sup> June. DGMARE understood the workload issue and the need to find ways of reducing the advice workload. DGMARE did not provide direct feedback on the list prepared by ACOM but explained that their needs for advice have changed with the introduction of multi annual plans (MAP). Currently the EU needs advice on fishing opportunities for all stocks for which TAC and quotas are set. With the implementation of the MAP the EU is distinguishing between target stocks (driver stocks) and other stocks. If a TAC is set for "an other stock" the EU will until otherwise decided still need advice on fishing opportunities. If no TAC is set only advice on the state of the stock (MSY and safe biological limits) is needed. State of stock advice may not be needed every year and DGMARE also indicated that they were prepared to discuss the frequency of advice for "TAC" stocks. This will be on the agenda for the 2017 ACOM consultation.

## **7.2 Reopening of advice.**

Following the agreement at the 2016 ACOM meeting it was suggested to the clients that the assessment and advice for the stocks currently subject to the reopening procedure be moved to the autumn. ICES also suggested moving the release of the mixed fisheries advice to October.

EU and Norway, the recipients of possible reopened advice, agreed at MIRIA to discuss the issue at their next bilateral consultations. Norway indicated that it could accept to move the advice release for the stocks concerned to October.

DGMARE informed at the meeting with ICES on the 22 June that, for the time being, changes to the current process could not be accepted. EU needs the advice for most stocks by early July.

When discussed at MIACO observers underlined that it is important that the advice is based on as updated information as possible.

## **7.3 Technical guidelines**

Two technical guidelines were published in early 2017 (ICES fisheries management reference points for category 1 and 2 stocks and Rounding rules to be applied in ICES advice). In total 13 technical guidelines out of the 25 guidelines agreed by ACOM in 2014 have now been published. There has been little progress in finalizing the remaining guidelines. A plan for finalizing the guidelines will be presented at the November 2017 ACOM meeting.

## **7.4 Introduction to the advice.**

ACOM requested in November 2016 the ACOM leadership to prepare a simplified version of the introduction to ICES advice to be discussed at the 2017 ACOM Consultation. The leadership has, however, not had time to work on the introduction during the first half of 2017 and will not be able to present a revised version for ACOM approval until the November 2017 meeting.

## **7.5 Ecosystem advice. Development of a framework for ecosystem advice.**

ACOM agreed at the 2016 November meeting to move forward to develop a framework for ecosystem advice and established WKECOFRAME. The report of the workshop was presented to ACOM at the Consultations in Fort Lauderdale.

ACOM found that WKECOFRAME had made good progress in developing an ICES framework and decided that WKECOFRAME should hold a second workshop with the same chairs, and the ToRs for this workshop should include a request to prepare a proposal for a dialogue meeting on the topic.

## **7.6 Fisheries and ecosystem overviews.**

Fisheries overviews have been published for the Baltic Sea and the Greater North Sea ecoregions. ACOM agreed in November 2016 to aim at releasing four overviews (Baltic Sea, Celtic Seas, North Sea and Norwegian and Barents Seas).

ICES has until September 2017 published six ecosystem overviews (Barents Sea, Bay of Biscay and Iberian Coast, Celtic Seas, Greater North Sea, Icelandic waters, Norwegian Sea).

The resources allocated to the overviews by ICES Member Countries have, with a few exceptions, been relatively limited and the production of the overviews has largely relied on the Secretariat and the ACOM leadership. The ACOM leadership does not find the current way of working sustainable.

ACOM discussed the overviews at the Consultations in Fort Lauderdale and concluded to continue with the overviews. ACOM will discuss and agree on a plan for the work at the November 2017 ACOM meeting.

## **7.7 Non-fisheries advice.**

Whereas the current advisory structure has proven suitable for addressing fisheries requests, it has been less well-suited for environmental and ecosystem requests. The limited involvement of a large part of ACOM in ecosystem advice requests puts a question mark on ACOM's ability to address these requests. ACOM therefore discussed possible changes to the Committee structure and working procedure at a WebEx meeting 10 October 2017. The basis for the discussions was a document prepared by an ACOM subgroup (annex 1 to this report). The document outlines the issue, what fails and lists four options for possible changes to the ACOM structure and working procedure to improve ACOM's involvement and ability to address the requests for advice.

The Committee agreed with consensus to maintain the current ACOM structure but change working procedures and urge member states to follow the requirements when nominating national ACOM members.

This means that the current structure of ACOM of one member per country is maintained but with a changed set of skills and background requirements for national ACOM members, and with a change in internal ACOM working procedures to support this change. The aim is to develop ACOM into a strategic committee overseeing the production of the advice, but not producing actual advice. The requirement profile of ACOM members should be changed in a way

that members have proven skills in science communication (mainly with clients of the advice) and strategic issues, rather than a specific technical expertise. ACOM members should be able to read, understand and comment on advice regardless whether it is fisheries or any kind of environmental or economic or social advice. Ultimately, ACOM is looking for a higher profile of members than at present, which however is in conflict with present time requirements.

It is important the ICES Member Countries actively support these changes and ensure that their ACOM member has the necessary mandate to coordinate the national contribution to ICES advisory work.

ACOM will review and revise its working procedure at the Committee's meeting in November 2017 with the aim of strengthen the Committee's ability to address non-fisheries requests and the members engagement in the advisory work.

## **Annex 1. Reforming the ACOM structure to improve the delivery of ecosystem advice**

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This document is developed as a background document for an ACOM decision on the further development of the ACOM structure prepared by an ACOM subgroup established at the 2017 ACOM Consultations in Fort Lauderdale in September 2017.

### **1 Background**

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ACOM was established in 2008 with a remit to oversee all ICES advisory services, including provision of strategic direction and leadership and the ability to establish such processes as necessary to prepare and deliver advice. In addition to ACOM, an advisory structure was implemented that included: Benchmark and Data Analysis Workshops, Expert Groups, Review Groups, and Advice Drafting Groups. ACOM replaced three previous Committees that had these advisory functions in the areas of Fisheries Management, the Marine Environment and Marine Ecosystems, respectively.

ACOM discussed the role of the Committee at its 2014 meeting and confirmed that the main tasks are to: a) oversee the advisory process; b) set the strategic direction; c) provide leadership around advice (prioritisation, connection with clients, and to balance what needs to be done with the resource available) and d) prepare and deliver the advice. ACOM also discussed the role of ACOM members. The Committee agreed that, in addition to contributing to the above tasks, members are responsible for following up on ACOM decisions at member country level.

ICES provided in 2016 advice on fishing opportunities for 205 stocks, release of 4 ecosystem overviews, responded to 3 recurring requests for advice on ecosystem impacts of fishing activities and 28 special requests. The majority of ICES advice is on fisheries management. However, there has been an increasing interest to seek ICES advice on ecosystem issues and 10 out of the 28 special requests were addressing non-fisheries issues.

Whereas the current advisory structure has proven suitable for addressing fisheries requests, it has been less well-suited for environmental and ecosystem requests. The limited involvement of a large part of ACOM in ecosystem advice requests, illustrated by the limited involvement of ACOM members in non-fisheries ADGs, puts a question mark on ACOM's ability to handle these requests.

The low involvement of ACOM in non-fisheries advice requests has been discussed at several ACOM meetings. Recognising that the current way ACOM is operating is not providing the necessary support to address non-fisheries requests, ACOM agreed, at the Consultation in Riga 2016, that ACOM would work harder at improving the composition of ACOM (including members, alternates and nominees) to better respond to non-fisheries advice. How this would be accomplished was left to the member countries.

The issue was discussed again at the ACOM's meeting in November 2016 and ACOM concluded that the decision taken at the Consultations in Riga was insufficient and would not deliver the required strengthening of ACOMs

involvement in non-fisheries work. ACOM therefore agreed to ask WKECOFRAME (meeting in May 2017) to address the issue and the workshop was tasked to “Identify options to ensure ownership of the ecosystem advisory process by ACOM and the wider ICES network”. As part of the response to this term of reference, WKECOFRAME recommended that ICES should rethink the membership of ACOM. In its report, WKECOFRAME discussed three possible solutions to the current ACOM; highlighting the possible advantages and the potential disadvantages to each. WKECOFRAME did not recommend any particular option.

The WKECOFRAME report was discussed during the ACOM consultations held at the Annual Science Conference in Fort Lauderdale (September 2017). During the discussions, it was made clear that the ACOM ownership issue in regards to the ecosystem advice had not improved during 2017 and that a solution was urgently needed. The present ACOM structure does not support the needs of the ICES community in terms of provision of overview of processes and development of the necessary framework for all areas for which ICES provides advice. ACOM discussed the solutions proposed by WKECOFRAME in terms of the composition of ACOM and developed some other potential avenues. ACOM agreed to return to the issue at a WebEx meeting to be set up prior to the Council meeting 18 – 19 October.

A subgroup was established to prepare the current document in which the various options are reviewed.

## **2 What is broken and why do we need to fix it?**

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The expertise held by ACOM members and alternates covers a wide range of topics including non-fisheries. You may therefore expect that ACOM would be able to take ownership of the response to fisheries as well as non-fisheries requests for advice. However, the experiences are that it is much more difficult to engage ACOM members and alternates in non-fisheries requests. In some cases, there has been no involvement of ACOM members or alternates in developing the response to a request and the advice drafting has to a large extent been left to the ACOM leadership and the secretariat.

Following the discussions in ACOM on how to enhance the Committees engagement in non-fisheries advice the nomination from ACOM of members of non-fisheries advice drafting groups has improved. However, the actual improvement in participation has been less than expected based on the nomination. The reasons for nominees not attending have not been reviewed. However, it seems that some of the nominees see themselves being nominated in their personal capacity and not as a national nominated member.

ACOM’s involvement in advice drafting groups can not only be measured by the number of participation. The members’ engagement in the work varies substantially and active involvement in specific advice requests are often limited to one or two members. The need to enhance ACOM’s ownership needs also to ensure a more active contribution from the attendees. This goes for both fisheries and non-fisheries advice drafting groups.

The relative low involvement of a large part of ACOM in non-fisheries issues not only results in low ACOM ownership of non-fisheries advice, but also hampers

the communication from ACOM to the ICES science community in many ICES Member Countries. This is illustrated by the low engagement of ACOM members in supporting ICES work with fisheries and ecosystem overviews. The development of the overviews was initiated by ACOM and the Committee has at several meetings confirmed that it sees the overviews as relevant, useful and important advisory products and agreed to give priority to them. Despite this, there has been limited support from most ICES Member Countries in the form of allocating resources to this work.

To address the shortcomings identified above ACOM believes that a structural change is needed. The structural change should in addition to address the current low ACOM involvement in non-fisheries request also aim at enhancing the communication between ACOM and ICES Member Countries and provide a general increase in ACOM members' engagement in the Committees work.

### **3 Possible solutions**

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The first three potential solutions discussed below were included in the WKECOFRAME report. Following the discussion during the 2017 ACOM consultations, option 4 was added.

In addition to these options, it was considered that, irrespective of the option retained it would be beneficial to more clearly define the roles and responsibilities of ACOM members and alternates. In that way, member countries would be better equipped in selecting members and alternates that would be able to devote the time required to complete the requirements of the ACOM work.

#### **3.1 Two Committees (Establishment of a new Committee)**

This option involves the establishment of two Advisory Committees to replace ACOM, one on fisheries advice and one on non-fisheries advice. ACOM as it stands at present could become the fisheries advice Committee with one member per Member Country. A non-fisheries advice Committee would be established with one member per Member Country. Ex officio membership to be determined.

Leaderships for the two Committees in the form of Chairs and Vice-chairs will be established. The co-ordination of the work will be a joint responsibility of the two leaderships. Current alternate system to be implemented for both Committees.

Advantages:

- i) clear ownership of fisheries and non-fisheries advice process;
- ii) likely improved engagement in non-fisheries advice;
- iii) clear location for fisheries and non-fisheries client interfaces;
- iv) encouragement of a wider ICES advice community;
- v) improved ability to bring, for example, social and economic factors into ICES' advice;
- vi) improvement in altering the perception of ICES as being mainly about traditional fish stock advice;
- vii) reduce the workload for individual ACOM members.

Disadvantages:

- i. increased Committee meeting and leadership cost;
- ii. in contradiction to ICES strategy of integration and carries a risk of lower integration than other options in longer term;
- iii. risk of result in two independent advisory frameworks within ICES;
- iv. may complicate dialogue with clients and observers;
- v. may reduce the individual responsibility for ICES advisory work when spread over two Committees;
- vi. may be difficult to return to a to one Committee if the change does not have the expected outcome.

### **3.2 Increase the membership of ACOM to two ACOM members per Member Country**

ACOM is maintained as the advisory committee overseeing all ICES advisory work and deliverables. The membership of ACOM is expanded to include two national members per country, having equal rights and responsibilities. Ex officio members include SCICOM Chair and all steering group chairs.

The nomination of national members will be up to the Member Countries. However, guidelines will be that the countries nominate one member responsible for fisheries issues and one responsible for non-fisheries issues.

The Committee will operate in plenary on strategic and planning topics and in two sub-groups when developing and approving advice. One sub-group will cover all fisheries requests and the other non-fisheries requests. Only one of the national members or alternates can participate at a time in sub-group work.

The current leadership (Chair and three Vice-Chairs) and ACOM alternate member structure will be maintained.

Advantages:

- i. better ownership of non-fisheries advice process;
- ii. improved perception of ICES' advice process;
- iii. likely improved non-fisheries advice;
- iv. encouragement of a wider ICES' advice community;
- v. may facilitate the developing of integrated advice by having a better balance between fisheries and non-fisheries expertise in the Committee;
- vi. improved ability to bring, for example, social and economic factors into ICES' advice;
- vii. improvement in altering the perception of ICES as being mainly about traditional fish stock advice;
- viii. reduce workload for individual ACOM members.

Disadvantages:

- i. increased ACOM meeting cost;
- ii. more cumbersome ACOM meetings;
- iii. risk that some member countries might choose not to follow the guidelines on membership and nominate two "fisheries" ACOM members;

- iv. reduced individual responsibility for the ACOM work (then spread over two national ACOM members);
- v. may be difficult to return to a reduced membership if the change does not have the expected outcome

### **3.3 Maintain the current ACOM structure (status quo).**

The current structure of ACOM is maintained. No change in membership rules.

Advantages:

- i. no extra costs;

Disadvantages:

- i. continuing lower perception of ICES than necessary;
- ii. greater risk of loss of non-fisheries requests;
- iii. involvement of ACOM in advisory processes dependent on topic, with high risk of low involvement in non-fisheries advice;
- iv. continuing reduced diversity in ICES' advice community;
- v. continuing difficulty in producing high-quality integrated advice;
- vi. low ability to bring, for example, social and economic factors into ICES' advice.

### **3.4 Maintain current ACOM structure but change working procedures and urge member states to follow the requirements when nominating national ACOM members.**

The current structure of ACOM of one member per country is maintained but with a changed set of skills and background requirements for national ACOM members, and with a change in internal ACOM working procedures to support this change. The aim is to develop ACOM into a strategic committee overseeing the production of the advice, but not producing actual advice. The latter has in the past led to highly technical (fisheries) discussions at ACOM meetings and Web Conferences, and in turn encouraged member countries to nominate ACOM members with fisheries expertise, to be able to contribute to what was perceived as most important part of the ICES advice (fisheries).

The requirement profile of ACOM members should be changed in a way that members have proven skills in science communication (mainly with clients of the advice) and strategic issues, rather than a specific technical expertise. ACOM members should be able to read, understand and comment on advice regardless whether it is fisheries or any kind of environmental or economic or social advice. Ultimately, ACOM is looking for a higher profile of members than at present, which however is in conflict with present time requirements.

To support this change, one could think of a multitude of changes in the governance structure, such as:

- ACOM membership should be rotating, which could be implemented with term limits [3-5 years, re-nomination to be discussed];

- maximum number of ACOM members with a specific background, alternating with different nations and/or different terms;
- confirmation of proposed national ACOM members by ACOM to ensure balanced background of members;
- role of alternates could be changed: they could be high-profile experts with specific background required for the advice production in the ADGs, as long as there is limited overlap between ADG and EG membership and should be more actively involved in the advisory process;
- there could also be an official assignment of chairmanship and membership of ADGs to specific member countries, rules on minimum participation of ACOM members/alternates in an advisory process for the process to proceed and/or official announcement of the annual resources allocated to ACOM by ICES member countries

No change to leadership structure is required.

This option requires that ICES Member Countries ensure that the national contribution to the advisory process is coordinated and the resources required are made available.

Advantages:

- i. no or marginal extra cost for ICES;
- ii. provides the ACOM Leadership with various operational tools to increase engagement of a wider ICES advice community;
- iii. wider expertise made available to the advisory work;
- iv. reduction of workload of individual ACOM members;
- v. may facilitate the developing of integrated advice by having a better balance between fisheries and non-fisheries expertise involved in the advisory work;
- vi. ICES member countries will have to take an active decision on ACOM membership at regular intervals which may have a positive impact on the ACOM members' engagement in the committees work.

Disadvantages:

- i. may not result in improved ownership of non-fisheries advice and may in practice correspond to the status quo option;
- ii. unsure if it will have a positive effect the quality of non-fisheries advice;