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## Coordination of a limited resource pool of experts available to the ICES Advisory Process – a new approach

### **The problem to be addressed and what the new approach must deliver**

The problem to be addressed is the need to match available scientific expert resources to the proposed work plans of the advisory process in a way which makes it possible for those in charge of resource management in institutes to prioritise and plan.

The use of expert resources has up till now largely been based on an informal process whereby experts on an individual basis keep track on their commitments in the recurrent advisory programme and are contacted directly by the ICES Secretariat to get agreements on their commitment to upcoming non-recurrent advisory work. This system has relied on an understanding that the experts involved will then use appropriate mechanisms at their institute to ensure that their commitments are part of the overall planning in their institute. A more detailed description of the nature of advice requests and the present setup is enclosed in the Annex.

However, it seems that this approach does not always integrate well with the planning in institutes and there has therefore been a wish from those in charge of planning in institutes ('resource managers') to be directly involved in the planning loop. It is part of the problem in the institutes that there are also advisory processes on national level and other international advisory bodies – especially STECF – which may require inputs from the same expert resources. There is therefore a need to develop a mechanism which enables resource managers to maintain an overview of the commitments and upcoming requirements so that they can plan and prioritise their inputs.

To date, little progress has been made and against a background of reduced funding in member countries, shortages of scientific experts, increased workload and the economic climate, the problem is acute and needs to be addressed.

ICES has initiated the development of a tool to ensure improved coordination of the available resources (scientist days) to be utilized by the advisory process. This includes consideration of the kind of expertise required and available, as well as an identification of areas where specific technical skills are in short supply. The tool consists of a web based information exchange tool and a process around it which facilitates the communication between the experts, the resource managers in the institutes, ACOM, and the ICES Secretariat so that resource managers are notified of upcoming needs, enables the resource managers to register their commitments, enables resource managers to prioritise and maintain an overview of their overall commitments to the advisory process and enables ICES (ACOM and the Secretariat) to have an overview of expertise available to fulfil the commitments to deliver scientific advice.

## The Challenges

The challenges to be addressed in relation to the efficient and effective use of experts in the advisory process are threefold:

1. That the overall pool of experts and the specializations available are increasingly insufficient to cover the increasing demand for advice.
2. That the demand for advice and the resulting demand for experts is increasingly ad hoc and dynamic. The major part of the advice and the need for experts still relates to recurrent advice that is given on an annual basis and can be planned in advance. However, the addition of new demands on the already fully utilized expert base requires extensive planning, exchange of information, and revision of existing processes both in the institutes in charge of the experts and in ICES.
3. That there is an increasing demand for expertise beyond single stock assessments – whether it is about integrating fisheries in a multispecies and ecosystem context or about requests relating to marine environmental policies and spatial management. This demand will often require that expertise is sought outside those institutes which have a national commitment to contribute to the advisory process, typically universities or national environmental institutes which do not receive funding to contribute to international environmental advice.

The annual recurrent advice and non-recurrent advice which is planned well in advance may be addressed by developing a formalized process in the last months of the year. However, ad hoc/ dynamic advice requires a flexible and transparent mechanism of communication between potential experts, their institute leadership/resource managers, ACOM, and the ICES Secretariat. In order to mobilise new types of expertise this mechanism must reach out beyond those institutes which traditionally have contributed expertise to the single stock fisheries advice.

## Description of the planned ICES Resource Coordination Tool

ICES is now developing a tool which will address the challenges outlined above – a Resource Coordination Tool (RCT). The tool is the core of communication between ICES (*ACOM* and the *ICES Secretariat*), the *experts*, those in charge of resource allocation in the institutes (*resource managers*) and those requesting advice such as intergovernmental commissions and governments (*advice requesters*). The tool will be available for ICES but also for other bodies providing scientific advice such as STECF (*advice providers*)

The tool will consist of

- An interactive, *online facility* where the potential needs for experts are posted by ICES/advice providers, experts and resource managers can register their commitments and experts and resource managers can maintain overview, prioritise and plan.
- A *process* around this online facility which ensures communication between ICES, experts and resource managers in order to identify upcoming needs and plan and prioritise resource use for the advisory process.

The *online facility* will consist of a data base containing the elements of the advisory processes starting from requests from advice requesters through expert groups to reviews, advice drafting groups, the ACOM process to the final advisory product. This data base will contain information about the amount and nature of the expert resources required in all steps in the advisory process. These resource requirements may be generic in the planning stage but will be specific (named) as plans are finalised and the advisory process starts. The facility can thus serve as a notification mechanism for the resource needs for upcoming advisory processes (from ICES or other advice providers to the resource managers and experts), as an instrument for committing named expert resources by resource managers and as an information source regarding the accumulated commitments by name and time for resource managers, individual experts, advice providers and advice requesters.

The online facility will be a specific resource coordination component of a larger ICES workplan tool covering both advice and science which also incorporates the texts of advice requests (or for science – scientific issues), ToRs for groups or processes, process calendar and the affiliations of experts to various groups and processes in ICES.

The *process* to prioritise and plan the use of expert resources, using this online facility, will for ICES be:

- The annual workplan (category 1 and 2 in Annex):
  - o Advice requesters make their needs for advice next year known to ICES through the MoUs for recurrent advice or through letters describing known non-recurrent requests for advice in the next year
  - o ACOM agrees in the ASC consultations and at its annual meeting in the end of the year on processes to deliver this advice including a workplan proposal
  - o The ICES Secretariat will, on basis of the workplan proposed by ACOM, post the requirements for expert resources to implement the workplan on the online facility. These requirements can in some cases initially be specified by institute and even names on basis of the list of registered participants in recurrent advisory expert groups, otherwise generic requirements regarding type of expertise will be posted.
  - o Resource managers and individual experts will then, in accordance with the local procedures in institutes, provide feedback regarding commitments to the workplan.
  - o Outstanding expertise requirements will then be resolved in an iterative process where the Secretariat and relevant ACOM delegates communicate with resource managers. Resolution of an issue may consist of a commitment of resources by a resource manager or, if it is not possible to identify resources which can be committed, consist of a message to the advice requester that it will not be possible to deliver that specific advice due to unavailability of expertise.
  - o The proposed processes including resource requirements and timing is then communicated to advice requesters by the Secretariat. If any issues are raised by advice requesters in this

- respect a new iterative process to resolve these following the same approach as above will take place.
- At the end of this process the resource managers, individual experts, ACOM and the ICES Secretariat will then have an overview of expert commitments on names and time during the year to implement the workplan.
  - Within-year requests for advice (category 3 in annex):
    - Within the year advice requesters send exploratory non-recurrent requests to the ICES Secretariat. An exploratory request is a text stating that a question of this type is considered and can ICES provide feedback on whether answering this request or a modification of it is feasible and what the resource requirements and timeline for this will be. On receipt of such requests the Secretariat will engage with the ACOM leadership to make a draft plan for answering the request after which the new potential requirements for expertise are posted on the online facility. Relevant resource managers, ACOM members and potential experts are notified of this posting. An interaction between ACOM members, resource managers, experts and the ICES Secretariat will then lead to either a proposal for a time plan to deliver the advice with the associated expert commitments or to a conclusion that it is not possible to answer this request within any reasonable timelines as wished by the requester.
    - If commitments have been made to the process the ICES Secretariat will then communicate the proposed process plan including timing and expert commitments back to the advice requester for final agreement.
  - All agreed expertise allocations and upcoming requests for expertise will thus be continuously updated so that both individual experts and resource managers can monitor their commitments and can prioritise and plan in relation to upcoming requests.

In order for advice requesters, experts and resource managers to maintain an overview of all commitments it is preferable that all advice providers drawing on the same pool of experts use the online facility.

The responsibility for prioritisation of advice requests lies first and foremost with the advice requesters who are in charge of the political prioritisation of legislation and agreements. The RCT does not in any way intend to interfere with this responsibility but intends rather to facilitate such prioritisation by making the resource requirements transparent to the prioritisation decision makers. Resource managers can prioritise the allocation of experts from their own institute on basis of their local priorities and expert availability.

One of the elements for prioritisation is to use the available expertise in a cost-effective way, which requires that both advice requesters and resource managers have an overview of accumulated commitments and the potential needs if advice requests under consideration are to be answered. The online facility will provide this information if it used by all advice providers drawing on the same pool of experts. The online facility is therefore open to other advice providers using expertise for scientific advice such as STECF. Obviously, this will be limited to the online facility while STECF or other organisations wanting to use the facility

would need to set up their own process around it to interact with advice requesters, resource managers and experts.

It is a strength of the RCT that it enables prioritisation and planning across EU and non-EU countries and that it, if the wish is there, can accommodate non-ICES expert resource users. It is an outstanding issue which cannot be addressed by a tool in itself that it does not in itself ensure access to those expert resources which are not available in institutes with a commitment to contribute to an international advisory process such as universities and some national environmental institutes. The immediate problem here is to find ways to fund their participation, after which they can benefit from taking part in the prioritisation and planning process using the tool.

The new Resource Coordination Tool under development at ICES is a simple tool that if utilized by ICES and the institutes, should allow a more efficient and effective use of the limited number of experts. It will also identify gaps in expertise. The ICES RCT does not address all the issues associated with our limited resource pool of experts, but it makes a start in dealing with the problem, that has been around for a long time. In order to address this issue in the longer term, there is a need for a continuous dialogue between expert resource providers, expert resource users, and those who request advice.

## Annex. The requests for advice and the current setup to resource the advisory process

### Description of current advisory requests to ICES

The requests for advice can be divided in to three categories:

- 1) Recurrent requests which are those requests for advice which are stated in MoUs and specify an annual (or in some cases biannual) delivery date. This is mainly fisheries TAC advice provided to the EU, NEAFC, NASCO, and ICES member countries, as well as the Joint Russian Norwegian Fisheries Commission. The recurrent request for annual TAC advice still constitutes the largest demand for resources.
- 2) Requests for advice which are one-off and planned at the beginning of each year. These are mainly OSPAR requests and some special requests from NEAFC.
- 3) Requests for advice which have not been planned from the beginning of the year and emerge during the year. These are mainly from the EU (fisheries and environment), but also from NEAFC, and ICES member countries.

In the past nearly all advice belonged to the first two categories. However, in the last 5-10 years the third category has grown and now puts a considerable pressure on resources. This is not only because of the new resource demand. The introduction of a new process during the year is much more demanding in terms of planning and implementation because it is about finding marginal resources, and timing their use on top of a schedule which is already full for most experts and for the ACOM-Secretariat time as well.

The current advice process for the three request categories is as follows:

1. Recurrent requests and requests which are known from the start of the year (1 and 2): The planning starts with a compilation of requests prior to the ACOM consultations at the ASC. At the ASC ACOM will agree on the overall plan for these requests and the generic ToRs for the relevant expert groups. The workplan including venues and timing of expert groups, review groups, advice drafting groups, and the ACOM finalization is then developed by the Secretariat in close consultation with ACOM and the experts involved. In this process the availability of experts is secured by direct contacts (normally email) between the experts and the professional and supporting secretaries in the Secretariat. The experts involved in this planning are chairs and stock assessors: for each expert group there is a chair or co-chairs elected by ACOM and for each stock a stock assessor (in some cases just an institute) is assigned based on last years' programme.
2. Requests which have not been planned (3): For ICES this starts with the Secretariat receiving information about a potential request from an advice client. The ACOM leadership will then discuss a possible way forward including possible proposals for modification of the request, the scope, potential experts (normally including the chairs of the relevant expert group and if relevant the stock assessor) and a potential process and timeline. If possible the request will be added to an existing process, typically as an extra ToR to an existing expert group, but this is generally not possible due to specific wishes to timing out

which are out of sync with expert groups or because expert groups are already overwhelmed. The Secretariat will then contact the relevant experts directly and ask for their comments regarding the request, scope, data needs, their availability and process. These questions are then resolved through a – quite often extensive – email correspondence between the experts and the Secretariat.

Once experts have agreed to a process and timeline, the Secretariat sends a letter to the advice client explaining (if relevant) proposals for rewording of the request, the planned scope, the process including expert involvement and timeline and a budget. The advice client will then return with a letter of acceptance or questions for further clarification. When a final letter of acceptance has been received the process is confirmed to the experts and the process starts. Needs for adjustments underway are frequent, mainly due to lower expert availability than they had confirmed in the planning stage. This may lead to a need to look for alternative experts and in some cases ultimately to a message to the advice client that the delivery date for the advice will have to be postponed to match actual expert availability. In some cases adjustments also become necessary because data or models turn out to behave differently than assumed and a different approach than assumed when planning must be taken.

#### **The Current Process – Regarding resource use / availability:**

For recurrent advice regarding fisheries, the EU member states receive some funding for experts' time and travel through the DCF. ICES has no information about how member states use these funds and does not track the availability of experts on this basis.

Expert availability is presently established by direct contact between the Secretariat and the relevant experts. ICES does presently not involve those in charge of overall resource planning at the host institutes in this process as it is understood that each individual expert will follow the procedures in place in their institute regarding communication internally regarding next years' work.

Special requests which can be accommodated as add-on to existing process (as new ToRs to existing expert groups etc) are not costed to the requesting advice client. The budget for special requests which require a specific process including meetings includes travel and accommodation for the experts and can for some clients also include a component to cover salaries/fees for core experts. The Commission (DG MARE) however, does not allow the latter with reference to a restriction in the financial regulation which requires that any new tasks with a salary component must be assigned through public tender. In those cases, the budget will only cover travel and per diem for the experts.