
ACOM Chair – Report to Council

1 Introduction

ACOM continued to be very busy in 2013. Multispecies advice was provided for the Baltic Sea (second time) and for the North Sea (first time) as well as mixed fisheries advice for the North Sea (second year - there is no substantial mixed fisheries issues in the Baltic). In 2013, ICES indicated which mixed fisheries scenarios were not consistent with a precautionary approach. Advice provided for data limited stocks (DLS) in 2012 was generally valid for two years. ACOM agreed a protocol in December (<https://groupnet.ices.dk/ACOMDecember2012/Meeting%20Documents/Doc%2004.b.ii.2-1%20Guidance%20for%20updating%20advice.docx>) to decide if the advice for DLS should be updated in 2013.

This report has been seen by ACOM and includes input from ACOM members and ACOM vice-chairs.

2 Overview of Advisory Activities in 2013 and planning for 2014

ICES provided fisheries advice for fewer stocks in 2013 because, as indicated above, DLS advice provided in 2012 was valid for 2 years and advice for deep water species and elasmobranchs in 2012 was also biennial. Advice continues to be provided mostly in the first half of the year, but the second half is also becoming busier because of non-recurrent requests (aka special requests).

ICES has so far provided advice on 29 non-recurring requests for advice compared to 21 in 2012 at a similar date. The first fourteen are non-fisheries requests covering a wide range of environmental and ecosystem topics.

1. EU request - monitoring of bycatch of cetaceans and other protected species
2. EU request - New information regarding the impact of fisheries on other components of the ecosystem
3. HELCOM request - Review of HELCOM draft Red List assessment of cod (*Gadus morhua*)
4. NEAFC request - Assessment of the list of VME indicator species and elements
5. NEAFC request - Closure area and additional measures for the protection of juvenile haddock on Rockall Bank
6. NEAFC request - Evaluation of the appropriateness of buffer zones

7. NEAFC request - Threshold levels for longline fishing
8. NEAFC request - Vulnerable deep-water habitats in the NEAFC Regulatory Area
9. OSPAR request - Data collection and storage to implement the OSPAR seabird recommendations
10. OSPAR request - Ecological quality objective for seabird populations in OSPAR Region III (Celtic Seas)
11. OSPAR request - Maximizing the use of available sources of data for monitoring of biodiversity
12. OSPAR request - Review of the technical specification and application of common indicators under D1, D2, D4, and D6
13. OSPAR/NEAFC request - Existing and potential new management measures for Ecologically and Biologically Significant areas (EBSAs)
14. OSPAR/NEAFC request - Review of results of Joint OSPAR/NEAFC/CBD Workshop on Ecologically and Biologically Significant Areas(EBSAs)
15. OSPAR/NEAFC request - Review and reformulation of four EBSA Proformas
16. EU request - Changing the TAC year for Norway pout in the North Sea
17. EU request - Distribution of megrim in areas IV and VIa
18. EU request - Evaluation of possible modifications of the long-term management arrangement for the Western horse mackerel stock
19. EU request - Evaluation of the Eel Management Plan progress
20. EU request - Interannual quota flexibility for plaice in the North Sea
21. EU request - Interannual quota flexibility for saithe in the North Sea
22. EU request - Opinion on modification to the list of deep-sea sharks
23. EU request - Opinion on the outcome of an in year revision for northern hake
24. EU request - Scientific advice on data collection issues
25. Iceland request - Evaluation of the long-term management plan and harvest control rule for Icelandic haddock
26. Iceland request - Evaluation of the long-term management plan and harvest control rule for Icelandic saithe
27. NEAFC request - Evaluation of the harvest control rule element of the long-term management plan for blue whiting
28. NEAFC request - Evaluation of the proposals for the harvest control components of the management plan for Rockall haddock fisheries
29. NEAFC request - Modifications of the long-term management arrangement for the Norwegian spring-spawning herring stock

Recipients and users of advice were told at every occasion that ICES needs at least 6 months to reply to non-recurrent requests¹. This seems to have been understood and fewer non-recurrent requests with highly unrealistic deadlines were received. ICES delegates are asked to encourage their fisheries management authorities to send their requests as soon as they are finalized. For example, joint Norway - EU requests are often agreed at the end of December, but not sent until several months later leaving very little time to organize processes to respond.

Five benchmark workshops were held in 2013 (Roundfishes, Pelagics, Baltic (including single species **and** multispecies benchmarking), Sprat, and Nephrops). One inter-benchmark process was held to finalize the assessment of herring in Subdivision 30 (in the Baltic Sea). The benchmarking process is now generally held in two steps with a first workshop to identify data and methods that could be used for the benchmarked stocks and a second workshop a few months later where assessments made using the agreed data and methods are evaluated. The benchmarking process has been improved as a result of more advanced planning and guidelines prepared by the Secretariat. ACOM will also consider opportunities for improving the benchmarking process at its December meeting. As you will see/have seen in the SCICOM presentation, the benchmark process is expected to evolve over the next few years to become a joint ACOM/SCICOM process.

ACOM Consultations were held during the ASC (September 22nd and 27th), and the next physical meeting is planned for the first week of December 2013.

ACOM leadership (Chair and/or Vice Chairs) participated in meetings with recipients of ICES advice (MIRIA), Regional Advisory Councils (MIRAC) and expert group chairs (WGCHAIRS). Briefs were provided to the Baltic Sea RAC, Pelagic RAC, North Sea RAC, North Western Waters RAC, South Western Waters RAC, European Commission, North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission, OSPAR Environmental Impact of Human Activities Committee (EIHA). The ACOM leadership holds Web Conferences covering dozens of topics about twice a month to plan and review work. The MIRIA meeting is a meeting with management authorities while the MIRAC meeting is with stakeholders. ICES delegates are asked to encourage their fisheries managers and stakeholders to participate in the relevant meetings.

In 2013, ACOM asked the assessment working groups themselves to do the audit type reviews that were previously done by Review Groups. As a result, the number of separate Review Groups decreased from 19 in 2012 to 10 in 2013. There were also 11 joint Review Groups /Advice Drafting Groups, 27 ADGs (including WKDECOVER) and 37 web conferences were scheduled. Of those web conferences 7 were cancelled because there were no substantive comments and the advice was adopted as drafted by the advice drafting group, including editorial suggestions by ACOM. This illustrates the fact the objective of ACOM web conferences is to approve the advice, the ACOM web conferences are not a forum to re-open substantive issues that have been resolved during the ADGs. Substantive discussions should be resolved by the EG or by the ADG prior to ACOM web conferences. There are concerns, however, that the reasons for “no

¹ Simple requests not requiring a meeting can be dealt more quickly as exemplified by the EU request to re-open the 2013 advice for northern hake which was dealt with in a few weeks.

substantive comments” is that ACOM is not paying attention and not fielding national specialist alternates who can comments on all issues in front of ACOM. ICES delegates are requested to ensure a better use of the alternate system and good participation in the EGs and ADGs so that substantive issues are resolved by these groups and that ACOM approval web conferences limit themselves to approving the advice and correcting errors, should any be found.

We now routinely get replies from potential chairs or core experts that they can only attend if travel costs are paid (or meetings moved to their home institute) and the Secretariat has to ask more and more people to get reviewers. Some of the resources that had traditionally been available to ICES are now going to processes that are fully funded such as STECF, DG ENV tenders or EEA tasks. With time, this may imply that ICES will no longer have access to sufficient resources to deliver on the requests it receives. In the end, this may lead to a move from a system where advice is obtained from ICES, an international quasi-independent network of scientists, to an internal process where advisers are paid directly by the organization that is requesting advice.

The overall appraisal is that the ICES advisory process is satisfactorily fulfilling its obligations on schedule. But as indicated above, the system (member country scientists, the Secretariat, ACOM leadership and ACOM) is overloaded and under considerable stress. ACOM is committed to streamline the workload by reducing the frequency of assessment, adopting simpler assessment/decision frameworks, and improving on data and document content management system. Improving efficiency is particularly important as additional requests for advice can be expected on integrated issues (e.g. MSFD and Good Environmental Status determination).

Planning for 2014 is well underway following the usual process. The Secretariat reviewed recommendations from expert groups and recurring and known non-recurring requests for advisory services to prepare an initial work plan. The plan was reviewed with ACOM members and expert group chairs at the ACOM Consultations at the ASC. ACOM will review the plan again and approve it at its December meeting. The approved plan will be a “living document” as changes and additions occur throughout the year as a result of additional requests or change of plans.

3 Criteria to update the advice

ACOM suggests that as a rule, advice will only be updated if there is a significant change in the assessment outcome. Recipients of ICES advice (MIRIA) and users of the advice (MIRAC) agreed with the principle but wanted more detail as well as an evaluation of the possible effects, i.e. apply the rule for a few assessments over the last 5 years or so.

Assessment working groups were asked to identify indicators that could be used to evaluate the status of the stocks and thresholds that would trigger updating the assessment and the advice. Working groups have informed ACOM that for category 1 stocks where quantitative estimates are available, the best indicators are fishing mortality, biomass and recruitment estimates from the assessment.

A workshop is planned for the end of November to further develop criteria for updating the advice taking into account the state of the stock, whether the stock

is under a management plan, etc. These will be discussed with recipients and users of the advice in early January.

Further work is necessary for stocks without quantitative estimates to identify indicators and thresholds, following the excellent framework developed by the Working Group on North Atlantic Salmon (WGNAS). This approach removes the need to decide ahead of time is assessments and advice would be update at what frequency - data are examined every year and the assessment and possibly the advice is updated only if there is a significant change.

4 Evolution in fisheries advice

Following discussions with recipients of ICES advice, as in 2011 and 2012, ACOM finalized a list of agreed fishery management plans (found at <https://groupnet.ices.dk/AdvisoryProgramme/Documents%20for%20information/Management%20Plans%20list%20and%20responses/2013/Fisheries%20management%20plans%20as%20currently%20known%20to%20ICES%202013.doc>) for 2013. As agreed with users of ICES advice, if a management plan has been evaluated as consistent with the precautionary approach and if the plan is agreed by all parties with a legitimate interest, the advice corresponding to the management plan would be presented on the first page of the ICES advice. If the management plan is not agreed to by all parties with a legitimate interest or if it is considered NOT consistent with the precautionary approach, the advice corresponding to the MSY framework would be presented on the first page of the advice (if F_{MSY} has been reliably estimated). Otherwise, advice on the first page would correspond to the PA framework. In all cases, the available basis for advice (management plan, MSY or PA framework) will be provided in the body of the advisory document. It should be noted that this list is not subject to discussion or interpretation. ICES is not in a position to challenge the acceptance or not of a management plan by parties with a legitimate interest. Parties should resolve between themselves the acceptance or not of management plans. Following the MIRAC 2013 meeting, management authorities were asked for criteria that could be used to reject a plan as a basis for advice.

As agreed at the Consultations in Bergen and confirmed by ACOM at its meeting in December 2012, quantitative metrics such as TACs or biomass in ICES advice in 2013 have not been rounded. In addition, catch advice instead of landings advice was provided whenever possible in 2013. Rounding or not, and how to indicate that not rounding does not imply precision to the ton, will be discussed further at the ACOM meeting in December.

ACOM successfully provided advice on a large number of stocks without quantitative forecast in 2012 based on the work of a Workshop on the Development of Assessments based on LIFE (WKLIFE) history traits and exploitation characteristics. WKLIFE2 was held in November 2012 to further develop the guidelines and improve them based on the 2012 experience. WKLIFE3 will be held in November 2013 to investigate, among other subjects, the usefulness of Productivity Susceptibility Analysis (PSA) for data limited stocks. The most recent guidance on the application of the ICES framework for Data Limited Stocks can be found at <https://groupnet.ices.dk/Advice2013/Data%20limited%20methods/DLS%20Guidance%20Report%202013.docx>.

5 ACOM Chair and Vice-chairs

On July 12, 2013, Poul Degnbol wrote to the ACOM Forum to outline the procedure to choose a new chair for ACOM. The procedure consisted of

1. Nominations to be made by the end of the first ACOM Consultations meeting at the ASC on Sunday September 22nd
2. Those nominated are asked (either at the Consultation or by e-mail) whether they wish to stand and if so, they are asked to provide a written statement regarding their intentions and priorities for their chairpersonship
3. At the second ACOM Consultation at the ASC on September 27th those nominees present will be asked to answer questions and the ACOM nomination will then be decided by voting. For those countries not represented at the consultations on the 27th the option of voting remotely or by authorisation would be arranged as the meeting itself is not a formal ACOM meeting but a consultation.

The General Secretary sent an e-mail to Delegates and ACOM members on August 21, 2013 on the process for nomination of Chair candidates, for nomination by ACOM at the consultation meeting on 27 September for appointment by Council. The procedure outlined was similar to that above.

1. Delegates and ACOM members are requested to solicit nominations for new Chair candidates by 22nd September 2013. This is the date of the first ACOM consultation meeting at the ASC at which ACOM will finalise nominations to ACOM.
2. Nominated candidates do not have to be members of ACOM.
3. The nominees will subsequently be asked whether they stand and if so, they will be requested to provide a written statement specifying the reasons why he/she wishes to become ACOM Chair which will be made available to ACOM.
4. Those candidates present at the ASC will be given the opportunity to briefly present themselves and answer questions from ACOM at the consultation meeting on 27 September, prior to the ACOM nomination.

Four scientists have been suggested as chair of ACOM: John Simmonds, Carmen Fernandes, Eskild Kirkegaard and John Casey. Eskild has accepted to be a candidate; John Simmonds, Carmen Fernandes and John Casey declined. During the Consultation meeting on September 27, ACOM was asked if they wanted to have an election even if there was only one candidate: 11 people voted against having an election and 5 voted in favor of an election. An election was therefore not held. Therefore **Eskild Kirkegaard was nominated for appointment by the Council.**

The ACOM Consultation agreed to adopt more formal rules for nomination for appointment at the ACOM meeting in December. The proposal from the chair will be that there is one vote per country, if every country is present, the majority is 11. The options on the ballot would be to vote for one of the candidate or vote blank. If on the first round one candidate has 11 votes, s/he wins. If no candidate has 11 votes, a second round is held. If after the second round one candidate has 11 votes or more s/he wins, if not the process goes on. If no candidate obtains a

majority, there are two options: 1) ACOM could report to the Council that it does not have a majority recommendation, or 2) the person with the most votes, even if is not a majority, is nominated to Council for appointment. This will be discussed at the ACOM December 2013 meeting.

The process for Vice Chairs was adopted in 2008: the Chair proposes candidate(s) to ACOM and if ACOM agrees, the candidate's name is submitted to Council for appointment. This process has been chosen to achieve a balance (e.g., in terms of disciplines, geographic coverage, gender, experience in terms of fisheries, ecosystems and environment). The approach gives the Chair the opportunity to form a strong team that fits his or her leadership style. The 3 year term for vice-chair Han Lindeboom will expire at the end of December 2013. Han has provided excellent services to ACOM being particularly involved in helping with the ecosystem overviews. I indicated to Han that I would not offer him a 4th year and that the next chair would decide to either offer him a 4th year or use the 0.25 person-year differently.

6 Integrated, multispecies and mixed fisheries advice

As indicated above, in 2013, multispecies advice was provided for the Baltic Sea (second time) and for the North Sea (first time) and mixed fisheries advice was provided for the North Sea (second year - there is no substantial mixed fisheries issues in the Baltic). In 2012, ICES provided scenarios (no TAC exceeded, all TACs caught, cod TAC not exceeded, status quo effort, effort management) without indicating which ones were not considered precautionary for what species. In 2013, ICES indicated which mixed fisheries scenarios were not consistent with a precautionary approach for what stocks.

ACOM is fully aware that the multispecies models it is using are subject to considerable uncertainties and that not all life stages, predator/prey and environmental relationships are taken into account. However, ACOM believes that including multispecies considerations where possible, however uncertain they are, is preferable to the current situation of assuming that there are no species interactions. The differences in catch advice for next year are minor, but they can be considerably more important when choosing long term targets and reference points.

Similarly, including mixed fisheries effects is subject to uncertainty, the main one being that catchability in the forecast year will be equal to the average of some recent years. Here again, ACOM considers that it is preferable to forecast likely issues knowing that in some areas a mix of species are caught together and their TACs may not be compatible e.g. for fisheries for cod in the North Sea.

We are now at the stage where policy choices have to be made if we want to take the next step by including multispecies and mixed fisheries effects in setting reference points. While it may be possible to achieve the target fishing mortality for all species, it is unlikely that the target biomasses will be reached for both predators and preys. Yield curves for most species are reasonably flat and a range of fishing mortality is generally consistent with achieving high long term yields. Policy choices must therefore be made in terms of target fishing mortality and biomasses in multispecies and mixed fisheries contexts.

ACOM is suggesting that a Dialogue meeting between ICES and fisheries managers and stakeholders be organised for the autumn of 2014 to discuss MSY in multispecies and mixed fisheries contexts. **Organising a Dialogue meeting requires Council approval.**

7 Planning Group on Commercial Catches, Discards and Biological Sampling (PGCCDBS)

The workload of PGCCDBS has increased to the point that it is not possible to cover its terms of reference during the current meeting duration. PGCCDBS suggested that two working groups be created, one to deal with sampling of catches, the other with the estimation of biological parameters. PGCCDBS may continue to exist as a steering group in the interim, but it could also disappear. The joint ACOM/SCICOM ownership of the Steering Group on Integrated Ecosystem Observation and Monitoring (SGIEOM) suggested in the Science and Advice plans provides a natural home for PGCCDBS and the two suggested working groups. The suggestion is to have two co-chairs for the SGIEOM, one focusing on surveys, the other on sampling of commercial catches and co-chairs have been found and agreed.

8 Steps in the advisory process

Until 2013, the ICES process to provide standard fisheries advice normally involved 1) a benchmark assessment with external reviewers, 2) an expert group meeting that does the assessment and writes a first draft of the advice, 3) a review group that verifies that the data and methods in the stock annex have been correctly used, 4) an advice drafting group that improves the advisory sheet and finalizes it, and 5) an ACOM web conference to approve the advice. In 2013, ACOM asked fisheries assessment working groups to implement audit type reviews (step 3). This was discussed with ACOM and with EG chairs during the ACOM Consultations in Reykjavik.

The message conveyed at the meeting with EG chairs is that audits **MUST** be done by EGs and that this is one of their main tasks. The guidelines for these audits may have put EGs on the track of more elaborate reviews than was anticipated and audit guidelines should therefore be revised to avoid this possibility. EGs are encouraged to use small groups of 2-3 people to ensure, during the meeting, that the stock annex has been appropriately implemented. The EGs should not proceed discussing assessment results until they have confirmed that the stock annex has been appropriately implemented.

ACOM was informed that Yong Chen (http://www.umaine.edu/marine/people/profile/yong_chen) from the University of Maine is interested in setting up a student review group. The ICES Secretariat will get in touch with Yong Chen to set up the process. This would be a second student review group adding to that of Steve Cadrin at the University of Massachusetts.

9 Strategic Planning

Bill Turrell drafted a first version of the Advice Plan in early 2013. This was reviewed with Bill, ACOM vice-chairs and the Secretariat in early May. A further draft was available for the special Bureau meeting in early September and tabled at the ACOM Consultations in Reykjavik.

The draft plan is articulated around three challenges: 1) an operational challenge to produce recurring advice (environmental, ecosystem, fisheries), 2) a reactive challenge to produce non-recurring or new advice (e.g. based on MSY) and 3) a pro-active challenge related to the provision of integrated advice. The first two challenges are reasonably well developed in the draft but the section on the proactive challenge needs to be developed further. ACOM vice-chairs Han Lindeboom and Mark Tasker will lead the drafting of the next version of the Advisory Plan to be discussed in December involving Canada, Estonia, The Netherlands and Poul. The European Commission will invite ICES to a meeting on the future CFP which may have implications for the Advisory Plan.

10 Criteria for use of data

One of the institutes of the ICES network conducted a stock assessment using a stock index provided by the fishing industry. When the fishing industry realised that including their index in the stock assessment resulted in a lower stock size and therefore lower TAC, they withdrew the index. At the Consultations in Reykjavik, ACOM discussed draft guidelines to avoid such unfortunate situation. Draft guidelines on criteria to decide if data collected in cooperation with or by users of the advice was tabled. The intent is to avoid having such data included or withdrawn based on the outcome of the inclusion. Care need to be taken that the guidelines/criteria should not prevent us from using some of the data that we are currently using e.g. unallocated landing. The criteria will be discussed with data collection people and will be finalized at the ACOM meeting in December.

11 Discard ban/landing obligation

The European Union is expected to implement a discard ban / landing obligation in the new Common Fishery Policy (CFP). Derogations are envisaged for species with high survival rates when discarded, but there are few studies to reliably estimate survival. Terms of References for a workshop are being developed in cooperation with SCICOM to provide guidelines for such studies. ACOM vice-chairs John Simmonds and Mark Tasker are following progress. ACOM noted that it would be useful to have the guidelines earlier than later to be able conduct survival studies during the 2014 field season. ACOM noted that there is only one year left to do baseline studies on the state of the ecosystem before the implementation of a landings obligation/discard ban. These would be needed to understand ecosystem consequences, such as effects on scavenging species. This does not only concern seabirds, as only c15-20% of discards are eaten by seabirds, the rest falls into the water column with a proportion reaching the seabed. WG Seabird Ecology and WG Ecosystem Effects of Fishing Activities both have ToR to consider implications and suggest relevant research.

12 Guidelines for EG chairs

A benchmark workshop was unable to reach consensus on two issues early in 2013. After discussion at Bureau in February, draft guidelines were prepared. The draft guidelines were discussed at the ACOM Consultations in Reykjavik and subsequently updated, but there remains some disagreement that may be resolved by amending the text. The guidelines are useful when there are clear pros and cons, but some of the problems that were encountered recently did not have clear scientific pros and cons and views were not entirely disconnected from outcomes. This will be on the agenda for the December ACOM meeting.

13 Follow up on the World Conference on Stock Assessments Methods (WCSAM)

The World Conference on Stock Assessments Methods (WCSAM) held in Boston in mid-July was a great success. The conference recommended that the Strategic Initiative on Stock Assessment Methods (SISAM) be continued and that ICES should continue to lead it. Further discussion between ACOM and SCICOM are needed to map the future course of action.

In more practical terms, ACOM agreed to investigate the reason for differences from the various models on southern horse mackerel and try to validate that ICES' results are the best basis for advice. This could include self test with simulated data and carrying out the short term predictions from all the models. This stock is of interest mostly to Spain and Portugal who have been informed that if they were able to carry this work before the next assessment, ICES would organize a review of the work in advance of the next assessment.

ACOM also agreed that self tests of assessment methods with simulated data should become a standard part of the benchmarking process.

ACOM noted that standardizing assessment results (biomass, F) to reference points would be a useful way of presenting results.

ACOM was reminded that the objective is to provide advice for fisheries management, not to do assessments for the purpose of doing assessments (high tech vs low tech approaches).

14 Ecosystem overviews

Ecosystem overviews were last produced in 2008. A process was agreed in 2012 to produce ecosystem overviews in 2013 to be used by assessment working groups in 2014. A workshop (WKECOVER) was held in early 2013 to agree on a format for the ecosystem overviews. The original idea was that integrated ecosystem assessment working groups were going to populate the ecosystem overviews according to the format agreed at WKECOVER, but IEA WG got carried away and produced much more than was expected. A drafting workshop (WKDECOVER) will be held in November 2013 to produce the overviews in the agreed format from the material produced by the IEA WGs. The drafting workshop will be chaired by the OSPAR Executive Secretary, Darius Campbell. The ecosystem overviews are expected to have a direct connection with the advice.

15 ICES web site – search facility

ACOM asked that the link to the latest ICES advice (<http://www.ices.dk/community/advisory-process/Pages/Latest-advice.aspx>) be brought higher on the home page e.g. with the EXPLORE US, NEWS AND EVENTS etc. so that it would be seen without having to scroll down the page. This was also specifically requested by the Pelagic Regional Advisory Council.

ACOM asked that the search facility be improved and be made at least as good as the search facility on the previous web site. Google could be approached to see if it can be used as the internal search facility.

16 Popular advice

Popular advice (<http://www.ices.dk/publications/our-publications/Pages/Popular-advice.aspx>) was produced for the second year at the request of the European Commission and as part of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). In December 2012, ACOM agreed a process by which the popular advice was going to be provided in two parts: 1) a static part (covering biology, distribution, etc.) that could be prepared in advance of the advisory season and 2) a dynamic part that would change when the advice is updated. The translation from the actual advice to the popular advice would be through a pre-agreed dictionary that would translate the ICES advice into a popular version. Good progress has been achieved and it will soon be possible to translate automatically the ICES advice into a popular advice version.