

# Annual Meeting between ICES and Requesters of ICES Advice (MIRIA)

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# Contents

i	Executive summary .....	2
1	Welcome and opening of the meeting .....	3
2	Adoption of agenda .....	3
3	Review and news .....	3
	3.1 Review of ICES Advisory services in 2020 .....	3
	3.2 Guide to ICES Advice and 10 principles .....	4
4	COVID-19 pandemic disruption .....	4
	4.1 Response of ICES to the pandemic, and potential impact in 2021 .....	4
	4.2 Feedback for MIRIA on concerns about disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic .....	5
5	Fisheries and Ecosystem Overviews .....	6
6	ICES Advisory Plan Priority Area – evolving advice .....	7
7	Any other business .....	7
8	Closing .....	8
Annex 1:	List of participants .....	9
Annex 2:	Draft Agenda (annotated) .....	13

## i Executive summary

The annual meeting between ICES and Requesters of ICES Advice (MIRIA) took place online in January 2021. Most of the organisations with formal advice agreements and memoranda of understanding, and a number of ICES member countries participated. This was the first time that MIRIA took place through remote means.

The meeting covered a review of the advice and advice processes in 2020, the new guide to ICES advice, the measures taken to assess and mitigate the disruption caused by COVID-19 pandemic, a discussion and survey on the ecosystem and fisheries overviews, and future advice needs of the requesters. During Any Other Business the issue of survivability of discards was discussed.

The discussions and information shared are used by ACOM to ensure the saliency of the science and the appropriateness of the advice to the needs of the requesters. Bilateral meetings with individual organisations and member countries also take place in the environs of MIRIA. These are not reported in this report.

# 1 Welcome and opening of the meeting

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Subsequent to a short welcome the MIRIA participants were briefed about the remote meeting etiquette. The participating organisations and countries introduced themselves.

The meeting was attended by representatives from Denmark, EU DG ENV and DG MARE, Faroe Islands, France, Iceland, ICES, NEAFC, Norway, OSPAR, Sweden, and United Kingdom (see list of participants in Annex 1).

# 2 Adoption of agenda

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The agenda (Annex 2) was adopted without further additions.

# 3 Review and news

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## 3.1 Review of ICES Advisory services in 2020

An overview of the advice process and the advice provided in 2020 was given in Document 03. Progress on quality assurance was included.

A round table for comments took place and MIRIA was invited to review the advisory process in 2020 and to discuss any issues and concerns arose since the 2020 MIRIA meeting.

ICES Secretariat and the Advisory Committee (ACOM) was thanked by advice requesters for cooperation and handling of advice requests during 2020 under unusual circumstances. The establishment of new agreements/MoUs were mentioned as very positive experiences.

WKFORBIAS (Workshop on catch forecasts from biased assessments) was seen as an important workshop in 2020. Conclusions of the workshop were that causes for these biases are multiple and stock-dependent (model, data related). The Workshop produced a decision-tree which provides the experts with guidance as how to check the bias with other measures as well as the next steps in the process to handle high retrospective bias (benchmark/interbenchmark, down-grading, etc.). Additional developmental work was briefly described to MIRIA.

WKSCINDI (Workshop on Science with Industry Initiatives) was mentioned as an important workshop in 2020 and progress on the use of industry collated data was encouraged.

In terms of timing of advice release, issues were raised by MIRIA. The advice on bycatch would preferably be timed with the advice on catches. The challenges in the timing of the advice relate to the dataflows/reporting of observations. ICES will work with advice requesters improving the dataflows to facilitate a timely release of advice. The timing of the mixed fisheries advice was raised as problematic given the lateness of the release. Mitigation measures were requested in order to make the advice more operational. A number of initiatives would aid production, including ceasing the re-opening process. On retrospective bias, ICES explained that another workshop would be needed to develop methods.

Recurrent advice is well planned and delivered, however a request was put forward that when stocks are changed from MSY advice to PA advice, it would be preferable to get insights as to re-establish the stock with MSY advice. It is impossible to predict when such cases arise and ICES strives at providing an advice rather than cancelling a release. Generally, increased understanding (i.e. research) reduces the likelihood of a change in advice type, although some changes are due to process problems and ICES strives to resolve those immediately.

2021 looks challenging given the changes within EU and further impact of COVID-19. It is likely that the issue of stock units and management units will become pertinent. ICES will discuss this further in relevant bilateral meetings in 2021.

The relation between ICES and ASCOBANS (Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas) was raised; ICES has no cooperation agreement with ASCOBANS and the interaction is limited. NEAFC will facilitate an invitation to a bycatch meeting in ASCOBANS.

### 3.2 Guide to ICES Advice and 10 principles

The [Guide to ICES Advice](#) and the rationale for its creation was presented to MIRIA. MIRIA was invited to comment on the Guide and the 10 principles and which of those is perceived as most pertinent to ICES advice.

MIRIA considered the principles to be very clear and well described. Many considered them to be 'common sense', and in most cases being applied in practice already by ICES, but it was nevertheless considered useful and important to have them in writing. Principle 2 (iterative dialogue to clarify the requester's needs and expectations during request formulation) was noted as being particularly pertinent and necessary.

There was interest in the topic of Viewpoints, as many requesters were less familiar with these products. In particular, MIRIA was interested in how the topics were chosen and how they could be proposed in future. Viewpoints are one-off advisory products prepared by ICES, intended to stimulate or inform environmental policy and management practices. There is presently no formal document in the guidelines package regarding development of these. They are ICES instigated and bottom-up formulated. Expert group chairs, often science groups, are invited to propose candidate topics. These tend to be areas of research where it is felt that the appropriate science/knowledge to inform on the topic is available to be synthesized into a useful document. So far ICES has published viewpoints on biofouling and risks associated with ships' scrubber discharge water. Upcoming viewpoints being considered include aquaculture pathogens, biological effects of contaminants, and marine litter (not yet confirmed).

## 4 COVID-19 pandemic disruption

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### 4.1 Response of ICES to the pandemic, and potential impact in 2021

The mitigation measures and impact of the pandemic on the advice production and look forward to 2021 were presented and MIRIA was invited to comment.

Travel restrictions related to COVID-19 had started in March 2020 while the ACOM annual meeting was taking place. At the meeting, it was decided to adapt the single stock advice sheets to an "abbreviated format" and to prioritize ToR for assessment working groups. The style of the upcoming working groups, to be help online, was also discussed. It was decided to suspend temporarily the evaluation of special requests. Subsequently, special requests for advice were evaluated again from April 2020 onwards.

In spring 2020 ICES investigated how the COVID-19 pandemic was affecting fisheries sampling. EU countries were the most affected by poorer sampling due to COVID-19, especially in at-sea sampling and observers. Guidance was developed by ACOM on how to deal with missing survey data in stock assessments. Interim year assumptions in some short-term forecasts were also impacted by COVID-19 and further deviations from standard stock assessment procedure, as

recorded in the stock annexes, are expected in 2021. During 2020 ICES observed delays in some advisory processes and data delivery as result of COVID-19. All planned advice was however delivered.

In July 2020 ICES developed guidance for online meetings. ACOM discussed in September 2020 the format for the 2021 single stock advice and it was agreed to revise the 2021 advice sheets by including two sections. ICES meetings will be held online until at least May 2021 while planned benchmarks for 2021 will be delayed if no sufficient progress is shown in advance of the workshops.

## **4.2 Feedback for MIRIA on concerns about disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic**

MIRIA was invited to comment and share their own experiences tackling the disruption caused by COVID-19 in 2020.

The Commission shared that as soon as the COVID-19 outbreak became evident it reached out to all Member States (MS) in an attempt to identify which of the data collection areas were likely or had been impacted. All MS were asked to describe what was data collection state of play and how has it been affected. Questionnaires focusing on different thematic on all the different aspects of data collection were sent to all MS with special attention to surveys at sea due to its importance in the advisory process. These questionnaires have been updated regularly to keep track of the COVID-19 impact and its results have been shared with ICES and also with the RCGs which have played an active role in the gathering of this information.

In reply to this comment, ICES thanked the DGMARE for sharing the information, which provides valuable knowledge that can be used in preparation of the advice. ICES noted that this approach was mimicked to all its non-EU members in order to get an overall view of the impacts COVID-19 inflicted on data collection.

MIRIA queried in what way the advice sheets will be simplified and hoped that the new advice sheets preserve some features that were dropped due to the COVID-19, like sections that present the split of the catch by the métiers, landings by countries or any other stock related information.

ICES reassured that the sections highlighted will return to the advice sheet. The main change that has already been agreed by ACOM is the removal of the stock status in relation to the reference points (traffic lights). The rationale behind it is that this information is now included in the fisheries overviews where there is a breakdown at ecoregion level for a number of stocks in relation to MSY and precautionary reference points which is seen has a better place to have it. Also, the stock status in relation to individual reference points is already included in Figure 1 in the advice sheets.

There is initial indication that the assessments of large pelagic stocks have been less affected than smaller demersal stock where on top of the low catches there will be poorer samples which adds complication to the assessments. As for the interim year approach the experience from last year with help inform the decisions on the interim year and that it would be dependent on how we are regarding the disruption to the normal fishing operations.

Looking into the year ahead and despite the early days the UK requested feedback from ICES on which stocks have been impacted by the data collection has this would help future planning.

MIRIA asked if there is an intention to look back at last year's advice more specifically to the interim assumptions used in the forecast given the impacts that COVID19 had on some of the fisheries.



ICES replied that there are no plans to reopen advice or to revisit the interim year assumptions. If a special request comes in, this could be evaluated by ACOM but this request would need to be provided with data. However, as expert groups will start to meet from March, ICES will have a better idea of the issues around the interim year assumptions and there might be a need to revisit some of the advice already issued for 2021. This would be a preferable way to deal with this issue rather than having to deal with it through a special request.

## 5 Fisheries and Ecosystem Overviews

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MIRIA had been asked to complete a short survey on the current format of the [Fisheries Overviews](#) and the [Ecosystem Overviews](#) and comment on their relevancy.

Nearly all of the Fisheries and Ecosystem Overviews are now published, and the future of the Ecosystem overviews is being considered. A short description of the purpose of the overviews was given.

It was highlighted that a Workshop on Fisheries Overviews (WKFO) will take place in 2021. The questions in the survey made available to MIRIA before this meeting were described. MIRIA commented that the information is very useful, but that the structure is often not clear, particularly regarding the mixed fisheries considerations, which do not seem to fit well. It was made clear that this is a question that the WKFO will consider.

MIRIA stated that whilst the Fisheries Overviews were useful for a general overview, they were concerned that people used to the operational nature of the fishing opportunities advice (which go directly into a management decision) might be confused by the fisheries overviews purpose. It was concluded, however, that this type of condensed information is useful.

Ecosystem Overviews were then discussed. The Central Arctic Ocean is planned to be published in 2021. There was a description of WKTRANSPARENT (Workshop on methods and guidelines to link human activities, pressures and state of the ecosystem in Ecosystem Overviews) held in December 2020, and that the scope of this meeting was limited due to COVID19. The Workshop suggested a revision to the methodology of the wire diagram used in the overviews and contents list.

There was a question regarding how strong the link was between the five top activities and the five top pressures described in the Ecosystem Overviews and it was stated that these were all different by ecoregion.

MIRIA wanted to know when the overviews will start to affect the advice, as it was the policy and legal people are drafting papers as if the ecosystem advice is already a reality.

MIRIA stated that there are needs to be more objectives for the overviews, and a clearer strategy for what is needed, instead of just a non-operational document for interest. It was stressed that there needs to be coherence between the ecosystem overviews and other types of advice.

It was explained to MIRIA why the structure of the overviews was different by ecoregion, as the structure had evolved over time.

When asked if there was an intention to look at cumulative effects in the Ecosystem Overviews, it was explained that this would be done as soon as possible, however, the science hasn't advanced to a level that we could include it as yet.

MIRIA asked for the mixed fisheries advice to be taken out of the Fisheries Overviews, and provided as a separate piece of advice, and if possible as part of the single stock advice. It was also asked to deliver this earlier in the year. It was also asked that some of the diagrams and maps be made interactive and updated. It was explained that the placement of the mixed fisheries advice

would be discussed at the WKFO and that interactive diagrams was also on the agenda for that meeting.

MIRIA were briefed about work on regional management objectives. SCIOm has started a process to identify objectives other than ecological objectives, looking into legislative material to identify social and economic objectives. There is now a Working Group looking at all the key objectives for the different ecoregions.

## 6 ICES Advisory Plan Priority Area – evolving advice

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In the [Advisory Plan](#), ICES is committed to ensure that the advice remains relevant to policy developments and management challenges, with a need to horizon scan likely future evidence needs of requesters. MIRIA was asked to suggest science/evidence areas that are increasing in profile and likely to require input from ICES in the next 3–4 years.

The potential areas of consideration raised by MIRIA participants were:

- The oncoming revision of the MSFD to ensure that it is fit for purpose together with requests that also relate to the Birds and Habitat Directives, the second wave of national MSFD reports and Biodiversity issues.
- Recreational fisheries: difficulties in mobilising data and expertise in relation to a seabass request and on the spatial management of sprat were raised. In addition, the eel and salmon species mortality estimates by recreational catches, the assessment of survivability of key species and temporal closures on the advice were also mentioned.
- ICES was asked about the link between the Ecosystem Approach (or EBM, etc) and the fisheries advice and the development of management plans, including also the DLS approach, the data collection methods and link to industry, will cover on the bilateral. ICES, indicated that several of these issues will be addressed in the short term over the next year, but some need to be longer term.
- Another issue raised was the approach to sensitive species advice; what are the objectives, the state, the format of the advice. This includes, mammals, birds, turtles (in the Mediterranean) and other sensitive species in addition to sensitive habitats. The recipients would like a short, synthetic and normative advice rather than a general description. Praise was given to the emergency measures advice, a topic increasingly important.
- The bycatch in ABNJ waters was also raised including birds and deep-sea elasmobranch distribution advice and what the recipients can do with it in terms of management measures.
- Finally, there was support for the ICES' focus on the science/evidence in areas of Climate Change and Cumulative Impacts.

## 7 Any other business

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EU asked how ICES takes into account the survival of discards in stocks such as Plaice, Turbot, Sole and in catch forecasting/modelling for catch advice and some background was provided for this issue:

### Background

The inclusion of survivability in the production of advice and how this is taken into account has become a sensitive issue over the years. ICES has over the years presented and included the survivability in the assessment models for *Nephrops* and the idea is to setup something similar for flatfish. There are now several exemptions for discards for flat fish like plaice, sole, skates

and rays and while some of the fish discarded will survive it is difficult for stakeholders to interpret this as with the discard exemption fish can be discarded but this may not be necessary taken into consideration when producing the advice.

In summary this issue was raised to clarify two points one to look into how this information is presented in the advice sheets making it clear which stocks have into account the survivability in their assessments and a second point is what needs to be done in order to start moving other stocks towards the inclusion of survivability in their assessments.

### **Response**

In order to take survivability into account in the assessment and forecast there is a need for both the amount of discards and the survivability of these discards to be estimated or assumed. Over the last few years there has been an improvement in the estimation of discards and with that its inclusion into the assessments. In order to estimate the survivability of the discards specific studies are needed and since the introduction of the landing obligation and associated exemptions in the legislation more effort has been put into studies on discard survivability.

Discard survivability is very fishery and species specific has survivability depend on water depth, type of gear, outside temperature, season and obviously the handling of the catch on board. The inclusion of these in assessments needs to be done at benchmarks where all aspects are looked at and the supporting data evaluated.

ICES recognises that this is an important issue and a Workshop on the Inclusion of Discard Survival in Stock Assessments (WKSURVIVE) is scheduled for 9–11 February. The main intention is to ensure that a consistent inclusion of survivability in assessments is put forward where applicable.

## **8 Closing**

The meeting ended at 17:00 CET. The next MIRIA meeting will take place 11–12 January 2022, in ICES HQ, Copenhagen.

## Annex 1: List of participants

Name	Address
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## Annex 2: Draft Agenda (annotated)

### 1) Welcome and opening of the meeting.

*Meeting etiquette and introductions.*

[https://www.ices.dk/about-ICES/Documents/ICES\\_meeting\\_etiquette.pdf](https://www.ices.dk/about-ICES/Documents/ICES_meeting_etiquette.pdf)

### 2) Adoption of agenda (Doc 02).

*Including review of minutes and action points of MIRIA 2020.*

<http://www.ices.dk/sites/pub/Publication%20Reports/Committee%20report/ACOM/2020/MIRIA2020.pdf>

*Suggested dates for MIRIA 2022: 11-12 January 2022, in ICES HQ, Copenhagen*

### 3) Review and news

#### a) Review of ICES Advisory services in 2020 (Doc 03).

*An overview of the advice process and the advice provided in 2020 is given in document 03. Progress on quality assurance will be included.*

*A round table for comment will take place. MIRIA is invited to review the advisory process in 2020 and to discuss any issues and concerns arose since the 2020 MIRIA meeting.*

*Note: matters related to Covid-19 pandemic will be addressed during agenda item 4.*

#### b) Guide to ICES advice and 10 principles

*The Guide and the rationale for its creation will be presented to MIRIA.*

[https://www.ices.dk/sites/pub/Publication%20Reports/Advice/2020/2020/Guide\\_to\\_ICES\\_Advice.pdf](https://www.ices.dk/sites/pub/Publication%20Reports/Advice/2020/2020/Guide_to_ICES_Advice.pdf)

*MIRIA is invited to comment on the Guide to ICES advice and 10 principles.*

*MIRIA will be asked which principle is perceived as most pertinent to ICES advice.*

### 4) Covid-19 pandemic disruption

#### a) Response of ICES to the pandemic, and potential impact in 2021 (Doc 04)

*ICES will present the mitigation measures and impact of the pandemic on the advice production and look forward to 2021.*

*MIRIA is invited to comment.*

#### b) Feedback for MIRIA on concerns about disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

*A round table for comment will take place where MIRIA is invited to provide their concerns for 2021.*

**Break 15:00 to 15:20**

### 5) Fisheries and Ecosystem Overviews

*MIRIA will be asked to complete a short survey on the current format of the overviews and comment on their relevancy.*

Fisheries Overviews: <https://www.ices.dk/advice/Fisheries-overviews/Pages/fisheries-overviews.aspx>

Ecosystem Overviews: <https://www.ices.dk/advice/advisory-process/Pages/Ecosystem-overviews.aspx>



The online survey will be circulated the week before.

**6) ICES Advisory Plan Priority Area – evolving advice.**

*In the [Advisory Plan](#), ICES is committed to ensure that the advice remains relevant to policy developments and management challenges, with a need to horizon scan likely future evidence needs of requesters.*

*MIRIA will be asked to suggest science/evidence areas that are increasing in profile and likely to require input from ICES in the next 3-4 years.*

**7) Any other business.**

*Please inform ICES secretariat of any issues by 7 January.*

- i) From EU: how ICES takes into account the survival of discards in stocks such as Plaice, Turbot, Sole and in catch forecasting/modelling for catch advice

**Close 17:00**