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Welcome

The participants were welcomed to the meeting by ACOM Chair Eskild Kirkegaard. A special welcome was made to Michele Casini who attended the ACOM meeting for the first time and to Ghislain Chouinard who will be new ACOM Vice-Chair in 2016 replacing John Simmonds.

The meeting was attended by all ICES member countries except Lithuania. Greenland, the Faroes Islands and EU were represented at the meeting as observers together with the SSGIEA Chair, the SSGIEOM Chair, the BSG Chairs (see list of participants in Annex 1).

1 Adoption of agenda

The agenda was presented by the Chair and approved by ACOM with no additional items added.

2 Review of membership

ACOM was invited to review and update the ACOM membership list and also add expertise for each member/alternate in the list. Changes should be reported to the Secretariat.

3 Minutes from ACOM Consultations

The minutes were approved without comments.

4 Review of 2015

4.1 Chair's report to ACOM

The ACOM chair, Eskild, presented his report of the 2015 advisory processes and noted that it had been a very busy year with:

- Recurrent advice on 225 stocks;
- 3 advice on ecosystem impacts of fishing activities.
- 25 special requests on impact of fisheries, evaluation of fisheries management, MSFD, eutrophication guidelines.
- 5 technical services
- 13 benchmark process
- 34 Advice drafting groups
- 34 web-conference, of which 15 were cancelled.

The Chair noted that:

- The expert groups had been very good at addressing the ToRs related to advisory tasks but less on other ToRs. The latter was assumed to be due to workload issues.
- The preparatory work of the assessment expert group had in some cases not been optimal. One of the main problems was the timeliness of data availability. In sev-

eral countries there seems to be an unbalance between the resources allocated to data collection and to data processing.

- There had been a number of examples where expert groups had addressed a mixture of update assessment and benchmarks. This had created an additional workload in the advisory system with very short notice to set up review processes. Not an ideal situation.
- In several cases benchmark workshops had difficulties in finalising the work. The ACOM leadership, therefore, consider that benchmarks should be established as process instead of single workshops, to ensure that at the end of the process the required outputs are achieved.
- The ADGs had operated better in 2015 than in previous years and the participation had improved.
- 15 web conferences were cancelled. The ACOM leadership is not able to assess if the no- comments for the web conference cancelled means that ACOM members had read the draft advice and did not have any comments or did not comment because they had not read the advice.
- The feedback from the recipients of the advice on the advisory process and the quality of the advice was positive, which is a good sign.

4.2 Council meeting October 2015

A summary of the actions of direct relevance to ACOM agreed by the Council at the October meeting was presented. The minutes of the meeting had not yet been adopted.

4.3 ACOM members review

ACOM was invited to review the advisory process and the performance of ACOM in 2015. A number of issues were highlighted during the discussion:

- Workload is a real issue and there is no apparent strategy to deal with this.
- The special requests add to the workload, especially if they are not well defined.
- ADGs had caused a tremendous amount of work, Secretariat and ACOM vice chairs had been very helpful. Also recruiting ACOM alternates to attend ADGs is difficult as they are so busy at home that it is difficult to get them to do additional work.
- The new advice format had helped reducing part of workload.
- Benchmarks are a problem.
- Data calls, ICES should not be too micromanaging the data calls. If the EGs can do their work without complying with the data call, then ICES should not report this to the EU as non-compliance.
- Cancelled ACOM WCs, this is a good thing, if the advice is drafted well, but it may be an issue of concern as people may not be reading the advice.
- Data calls, a good thing, although they generates a lot of work and the deadlines are tough, especially for special requests.
- Benchmarks are never ending.
- Benchmarks should review survey data as well, and not agree on using or not using data without proper analysis.
- Benchmarks need better preparation.
- Special requests need more clarification.
- ADG participation from countries without interest in the fisheries, how much do they actually participate? We need to unpack this.
- Need for clarification on the reference point process, etc.

- Flexibility - where does it stop in order to ensure client satisfaction and quality of work? Better communication is needed.
- Data calls- special requests are a problem.
- Workload is always a problem for a small country.
- Difficult to attend ADGs that aren't relevant to your country.
- Participation in ADGs is often almost the same as the EG. Is that okay?
- Increased ADG participation worked well, as long as enough warning was given on the schedule.
- The special request data call associated with WKPROXY was very difficult.
- Benchmarks—Eastern Baltic cod. Very disappointing.
- Need to ensure that knowledge generated by science is incorporated into advice.

5 Advisory process

The ACOM chair, provided background information for Agenda item 5 that was then addressed by a subgroup and presented in plenum.

5.1 Frequency of assessment

ACOM reviewed Doc 5a (Frequency of assessment) and concluded that most assessment WGs did not as requested in the generic ToRs provide a list of category 1 and 2 stocks to be considered candidates for less frequent assessment. Only WGNSSK fully responded to ACOM's request. It is unclear from the review of Doc 5a why some of the WGs did not respond to the request. WGNSSK found 4 stocks that fulfilled the 4 criteria identified in Table 1 of the procedure agreed by ACOM (life span, status relative to MSY, percentage of recruiting year classes in catch, Mohn's rho). The catch advice stability criterion in Table 2 was only checked for 1 stock, which passed the condition of less than 15% change on average.

WGNSSK made 2 main comments about reducing the frequency of the assessment: (1) that the amount of time conducting an update assessment is quite modest compared to the time spent in collecting and preparing the assessment data; (2) that the relatively simple tests proposed by ACOM might not be sufficient to determine the risk of unwanted outcomes and that a simulation analysis (MSE-type) should be undertaken and that this would require a lot of additional work in the short-term that may not pay off taking comment (1) into account.

Regarding point (1) of WGNSSK: It should be explained to WG chairs that whereas conducting update assessments should, in principle, not be very time consuming, in practice this often means that WGs change aspects of the assessment instead of conducting updates, and this takes time. Additionally, because there is a new assessment, there is a need to follow up with a full advisory process, which also takes additional time and resources. The reopening procedure is a good illustration of the problem: Here, the agreed protocol is strictly adhered to and thus neither data compilation nor the reassessment itself takes much time.

ACOM agreed to continue with the work to explore the possibilities of reducing the frequency of assessment. Frequency of advice is agreed with clients and fixed in the MoUs, but ICES should be able to decide on the frequency of assessment. A condition is that the quality of the advice should not deteriorate as a consequence of conducting less frequent assessments; this is why a set of criteria must be fulfilled before a stock is considered a candidate for less frequent assessments.

The EU representative noted that ACOM should be aware that, for high profile stocks, there may be demands from Member States to conduct assessments annually (e.g. if national institutions indicate they have an assessment in a particular year, even if ICES has not conducted one) and that this might lead to more Special Requests.

ACOM agreed that the plan described at the beginning of Doc 5a should be put into practice with some modifications.

ACOM agreed the following procedure to finalize the work on “frequency of assessment” in 2016

- (A) Before the start of each assessment WGIN 2016, a list of candidate stocks according to the 3 first of the 4 originally identified criteria (life span, status relative to MSY, percentage of recruiting year classes in catch, Mohn’s rho) will be prepared by the secretariat in cooperation with ACOM 2015 ADG Chairs and the ACOM leadership.
- (B) The relevant Expert Groups will be requested to evaluate the fourth criteria (Mohn’s rho) for the stocks included in the list referred to under (A) and to comment on the list. A ToR will be added to the generic ToRs for Expert Groups.
- (C) A workshop will be set up in the autumn of 2016, with the main objective to produce the final list for ACOM’s consideration in December 2016. The workshop will be requested to prepare the multiyear projections (for all stocks that fulfil the original 4 criteria) in order to be able to ascertain the stability of catch advice (these projections could be done by the new stock assessment posts at the Secretariat). The workshop could also consider any other more in-depth work that may be brought forward for some stocks (e.g. stocks with occasional recruitment spikes) and, potentially, existing or developing simulation (MSE-type) work to evaluate risks or other aspects.
- (D) ACOM evaluates at the 2016 meeting the results of the workshop and agrees on the frequency of assessments as part of the adoption of the ToR for expert groups for 2017.

5.2 Expert groups – Benchmark processes

The experiences in 2015 have been that expert groups and advice drafting groups often deviate from the methods and approaches agreed at benchmarks. This may partly be a result of the benchmark processes have not been able to finalize the benchmarks within the agreed time frames. The result has been that several assessments that have been based on methods or data series that have not been through a full benchmark process.

There is also some concern that the current review process for benchmarks does not carry sufficient ACOM oversight, and benchmark outcomes accepted by the reviewers may have advisory implications outside the remit/ or knowledge of the review.

ACOM discussed the issue on the basis of the following questions:

- Is the current benchmark system appropriate or is there a need for enhancing it?

- Is it realistic to anticipate that the Expert Groups will focus on doing update assessments and not address assessment methods and data quality issues? And is this the best use of the expertise in the Expert Groups?
- How to ensure the appropriate oversight and follow up from ACOM?

Subgroup discussion:

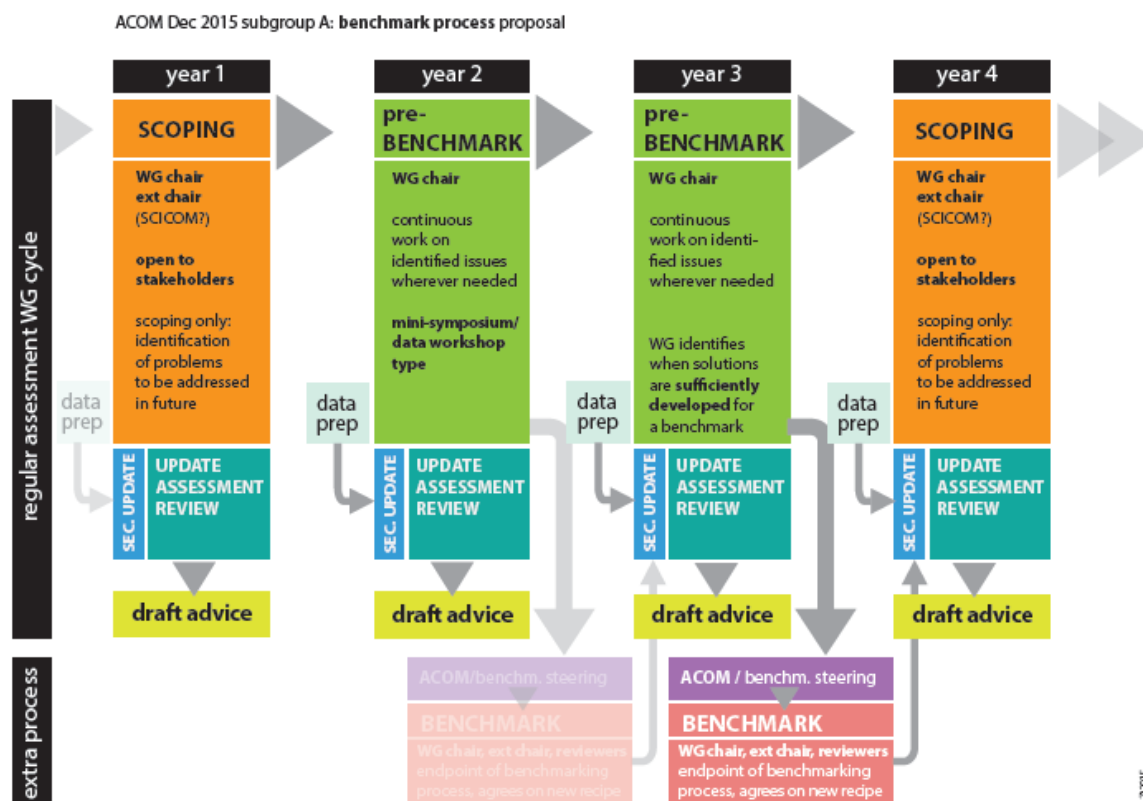
An extensive discussion took place in the subgroup on this issue.

The subgroup agreed that ICES should end up with a system where update assessments are just updates and can be conducted by the Secretariat (or any other external expert) rather than needing to be conducted by WG scientists familiar with the specific stock. The Assessment WG should review the results of the update assessments during their annual meeting and prepare the 1st draft of the advice.

The WGs should use their annual meeting more productively, making more relevant use of their expert knowledge than is done presently. ICES should be working more strategically, rather than focusing continuously on what seem like immediate minor improvements (which may turn out to be no improvement at all; there is a feeling in the subgroup that in some cases “developments” are being introduced too quickly into the advice, before being sufficiently developed or tested).

Assessment WGs should focus more of their effort on improving the assessments (all aspects, not just strictly the stock assessment models and including e.g. aspects of the short term forecast for advice provision).

WGs should take ownership of the benchmark process. This ownership was taken away from them in the 2008 reform: in retrospect, this was perhaps not too successful (it made WGs less attractive and may not be the best use of expert resources – and WGs found a workaround to continue changing their pet stock’s models).



Update assessments would be conducted by Secretariat, using data prepared and uploaded by experts well in advance of the Assessment WG meeting. WGs would review the update assessments; a draft of the advice should also be provided.

Every 3rd year the WG meeting would be a “Scoping workshop”. This is a critical step where all problems that need addressing should be identified (all stocks should be included in the scoping exercise, although for some of them the conclusion from the scoping could be that there is no need for any immediate extra work). The scoping workshop would have 2 (or even more) chairs: the WG chair and an external chair (e.g. someone more focused on ecosystem work); the workshop should include a breadth of scientists (data, single species, fisheries, multispecies, ecosystem...) and stakeholders. Stakeholders should bring their information and data to this workshop. This scoping workshop is extremely important as it charts the work for the next few years; the work and organization of the scoping workshop would need to be well planned in advance to maximize its chances of success. The outputs from the workshop should be a list of priority work and a roadmap, identifying responsible groups of people for different aspects of the work, separately for the ecosystem and single stocks dealt with by the WG.

Work would be developed over the next few years, along the roadmap provided by the scoping workshop; different parts of the work could be developed in different groups (assessment WGs and other groups involved in the scoping workshop and for which the scoping workshop identified follow-up work).

Data evaluation should be an integral part of the work (PGDATA worked on providing guidelines for data evaluation in their 2015 meeting). How data evaluation is best integrated in the stream of work? The assessment WG could hold a data workshop during their meeting in the second year.

When should a benchmark take place? When sufficient development and testing work has been conducted that it makes sense to consider the possible inclusion of the new work into the advice.

What is a benchmark? The benchmark process would be a review process, not a process where substantive new work is expected to be developed; the substantive new work should be developed before the benchmark is called upon (“pre-benchmark” meetings within the assessment cycle).

Proposals for benchmarks should be made by assessment WGs (in consultation with the external chair of the most recent scoping workshop?). The Benchmark Steering Group would review the proposals and present them to ACOM and SCICOM for approval.

Concerning ACOM and SCICOM oversight of the benchmark process, it is essential that ACOM members consider the proposed benchmarks carefully and raise any issues they detect; proper ACOM oversight at this moment is fundamental to minimize later problems and requires that ACOM actively pays attention when these proposals are presented to them.

Benchmarks proposed by scientists during a particular year (e.g. 2016) would go through approval by ACOM and SCICOM (alternatively: through the benchmark steering group) on the same year (2016) and, if approved by ACOM and SCICOM, the benchmark would be held before the WG meeting in the following year (so results would be ready for use in advice in 2017)

More on ACOM oversight of benchmarks:

There was general agreement in the subgroup that ACOM should improve its oversight of benchmarks and benchmark results. This should be done while respecting and maintaining the independence of external reviewers. The view was expressed in the subgroup that ACOM could be like a scientific journal editor who, even though uses independent reviewers, still has the final word on what is accepted for publication (in the case of ACOM this means what is adopted for use in the advisory process). ADGs sometimes are confronted with proposals (including assessment models or data series) different from those reviewed and accepted at benchmarks and lengthy discussions can develop over who has the final word on what should be the basis for the advice (i.e. who decides: the benchmark, the ADG, someone else...?)

Role of ACOM versus ADGs and versus benchmarks (with external reviewers) should be clarified by ACOM: who decides what is finally used in the advice? Should we allow external reviewers to develop/define ICES policy?

(a critical, but not the only question is: who decides on reference points?)

Should ACOM hold a web-conference to approve benchmark results after each benchmark takes place?

If this web-conference takes place, does it then mean that it provides the “final word” on what is used as the advice basis and that is what ADGs should follow?

Otherwise, should ACOM not hold the web-conference to approve benchmark results and then let the ADG have the final word on what should be used for the advice?

Whatever ACOM agrees, the guidelines for benchmarks, WGs and ADGs should clearly reflect this.

ACOM plenary discussion:

There was a long discussion about this suggested new structure. Points mentioned were:

- Process management - a feedback loop was missing, with actions taken if some elements of the work production line are not done.
- A bit like the old system. The Secretariat should not do most of the assessments, but generally a step forward.
- There is a danger that we will not get the right people to the benchmark process – we need to see benchmark broader than the assessment EGs.
- It seems that the Irish Sea process could be an alternative way and this is working the other way around from ecosystem goals and backwards to what that means for single species benchmark.
- It was questioned how standardized the assessment models actually are and will the Secretariat be able to do assessments was questioned. There is often so many small modifications to a model that it is not just pushing the button.
- The new system is forcing too much emphasis on the single species approach.

ACOM concluded that there is a problem with the current benchmark process and the proposal is a good basis for developing a new system. An ACOM sub-group was set up to develop this further taking into account the comments made. It should work with the expert groups and present a new proposal for ACOM Consultations.

A proposal for ToRs for the group was discussed and agreed by ACOM after the meeting. The agreed ToRs are:

Subgroup ToRs (work to take place during January-September 2016, by correspondence):

The main aims of the subgroup are to further develop the initial proposal prepared during the December 2015 annual ACOM meeting, focussing on:

- Enhancing the way stock assessment EGs work, in cooperation with the ICES Secretariat (in particular, the new stock assessment posts at the Secretariat).
- Developing a more productive working environment for the stock assessment EGs, which should focus their work strategically towards improving stock assessments and benchmark preparation.
- Creating a more flexible process to structure the work leading up to benchmarks, so that the work of EGs (including stock assessment EGs) can focus on the main issues of each ecoregion and benchmarks take place when sufficient work has been developed; this should allow benchmarks to produce higher quality products. As this involves a wider range of experts and EGs in ICES, it should be considered in collaboration with the Benchmark Steering Group.
- The subgroup should prepare a proposal for discussion during the ACOM consultations in September 2016. The proposal should be detailed (not just a sketch) and include a timeline for possible implementation. Foreseeable problems should be identified and, where possible, mitigation measures proposed to facilitate the implementation
- The subgroup should propose a special session for the ASC2016 in Riga to allow feedback from a wider audience on the proposed changes.

As there is overlap with the work of the ACOM-SCICOM Benchmark Steering Group (BSG), it is considered appropriate that this should be a joint BSG-ACOM subgroup, chaired by Carmen Fernández (ACOM Vice-chair and BSG Co-chair) and Jörn Schmidt (BSG Co-chair). The following membership was agreed by ACOM: Larry Alade, Robert Aps, Fatima Borges, Harald Gjørseter, David Miller, Carl O'Brien, Morten Vinther, Christopher Zimmerman. Cristina Morgado and Mark Dickey-Collas will participate from the ICES Secretariat.

5.3 Guidelines on handling of late data submission (Doc 5c);

A proposal for guidelines on how to deal with data submitted after the deadline was provided in Doc 5c.

ACOM reviewed Doc 5c and adopted it with the following changes:

(A) Replace heading “Late submission of data” by “Late submission of data or critically incomplete data”, to cover also situations where a submission takes place but the submitted data are incomplete to the point of affecting the quality of the ensuing work and advice.

(B) In point 3 under “Late submission of data” heading, add the following at the end: “If the missing data affect the quality of the advice, this should be noted in the advice sheet indicating the missing source (i.e. country or countries)”.

Other aspects highlighted by ACOM:

When a problematic data submission situation is encountered (late or incomplete submission), the ACOM member (to whom ICES addresses the data calls) should provide feedback to ICES on what is causing the problem.

When problematic data submission situations are recurrently encountered with certain data providers, this should be identified in advance (by expert groups and Secretariat), so that there may be an opportunity for a dialogue with the ACOM member and data provider to try and resolve the situation before it becomes critical once again.

It was noted that when historic data are revised in DATRAS or InterCatch, relevant scientists (e.g. stock coordinators) are often not informed at all or the provided information is not sufficient for them to understand quickly what has been changed. This message should be communicated to the people in charge of maintaining these databases.

ACTION: Data Center to be requested to improve the automatic information of revisions existing data sets. The information should be not only a notification of a revision but there is a need to be clear on what the changes were.

5.4 Advice Drafting Groups

To address the low ACOM involvement in the ADGs ACOM agreed at the December 2014 meeting on a system with a minimum participation of ACOM National members. The minimum participation was based on a proposal from the ACOM Leadership. The system has in general ensured a better attendance of ACOM members/alternates in ADG meetings but did not in all cases lead to more active involvement of ACOM members/alternates in the ADG. The Leadership therefore suggested the following slightly modified approach for 2016:

- ACOM members provide by 15th January 2016 the secretariat with their nomination of national participants in ADG planned for 2016,
- Based on the national nominations the ACOM leadership and the secretariat prepare in cooperation with the relevant ACOM members a proposal for national participation in ADGs where the participation based on the national nomination are considered insufficient,
- The proposal is circulated to ACOM.

ACOM approved the proposed approach.

5.5 Advice reopening procedure and requests for update of advice (Doc 5e)

ACOM was invited to discuss the need for a change of the current policy:

- Special requests for advice updates: Accepting requests for updates of advice when the resources needed to do the updates are available;
- Reopening process. Issue an updated advice for all stocks identified as candidate stocks for an update based on the analyses of the changes to recruitment independent of the magnitude of the resulting changes in the catch forecasts.

The subgroup considered a number of aspects:

Life history characteristics and stock status: The North Sea stocks, to which this reopening procedure is applied, are now generally in better status than 7–8 years ago. As

they are medium-lived stocks, their improved status should mean that the impact of incoming recruitment on the catch advice should be considerably lower than in the past (if that is not the case, this would indicate a fishery selection pattern highly skewed towards catching smaller fish). Additionally, because they are medium-lived stocks, if incoming recruitment is estimated in the autumn to be higher than assumed in the spring and the advice is not updated in the autumn, the recruiting year class should still be largely available in the sea the following year and there will be gains in the growth of the fish; conversely, if incoming recruitment is estimated in the autumn to be lower than assumed in the spring and the advice is not updated, the current improved status of the stocks combined with the fact that they are medium-lived should mean that this would not be expected to pose a serious threat to the stock.

Apart from the fact that reopening increases workload (although perhaps not in a huge way in the case of the protocol currently applied to North Sea stocks), the subgroup was unconvinced that the reopening process actually leads to better scientific advice, for two reasons:

- 1) The time spent by scientists on these updates could instead be spent doing more relevant work that would have a bigger chance of improving the quality of the advice when looking at the bigger and longer-term picture (perhaps a cost-benefit study could be considered by ICES).
- 2) From a purely scientific perspective, there is a feeling that these reopenings may be mainly reacting to noise.

However, to be able to have a clearer understanding and a more appropriate basis for discussing the situation with clients, the subgroup considered that a scientific analysis to evaluate whether or not reopening leads to better advice would be the most useful way forward.

Hence, concerning the autumn advice reopening process the subgroup proposes:

That a scientific study is undertaken to evaluate whether or not reopening leads to better advice. The subgroup has a preliminary suggestion of what kind of analysis and criteria could be considered, although the subgroup did not have time to discuss it and probably needs some more thinking.

The results of the study should be available to ACOM in December 2016, so that ACOM can consider them together with the frequency of the assessment (to the subgroup, it seems a bit illogical to have an autumn reopening protocol for stocks that are not assessed annually)

ACOM agreed with this proposal.

Action: add a ToRs for WGNSSK to conduct the study to evaluate the added value of the reopening procedure

When the results from the study is available ACOM will need to identify the next step but there is no need to address at this stage and is dependent on the study results.

Concerning “ad-hoc” special requests for updates of the advice, it is clear that this has the potential to introduce bias in the system and the ACOM leadership have made this clear in discussions with managers. The EC representative explained that in some cases what is behind these requests is increasing stability of the fishing opportunities over consecutive years. At this point, the subgroup has no obvious alternative proposal to what is currently being done (i.e. consider these special requests on a case-

by-case basis and respond to them if resources are available), but this issue should be reconsidered once again by ACOM in December 2016.

Action: add the “ad-hoc special request to update advice to the ACOM November 2016 agenda

5.6 Transparency;

5.6.1 Dialogue with observers;

With the exception of employees of government agencies that apply ICES advice no other observers are allowed in advisory Expert Groups. The ACOM leadership has been discussing with the EU Advisory Councils how best to bring relevant stakeholder information into the advisory work before the Expert Group meetings. As a test case a web-conference between the Pelagic Advisory Council and WGWIDE was held just prior to the WGWIDE meeting in 2015. The Web-Conference did not bring much additional information into the Expert Group and it may be necessary to formalize the dialogue to ensure that it adds value to the advisory process. The issue will be on the agenda for the meeting with observers (MIACO) in January next year.

ACOM was invited to discuss the dialogue with observers in general and how ICES can cooperate with observers to ensure that relevant information is made available to the Expert Groups.

The subgroup first discussed whether we should keep the current ICES policy of no observer access to ACOM working groups. Although there was no clear conclusion from the subgroup, the subgroup noted that if the proposal it made, to have the assessment working groups work as a scoping meeting every 3rd year, is accepted by ACOM, this would give immediate access to stakeholders to those scoping meetings.

The Subgroup also noted that managing the expectations of stakeholders when they participate in ICES processes is important; otherwise, stakeholders may be dissatisfied if e.g. they brought in certain data that they were not used.

ACOM took note of the discussions in the Subgroup and it was agreed that the ACOM leadership should take the issue up with stakeholder at the MIACO meeting in January 2016.

5.6.2 ADG and Web-conference minutes.

The minutes of ADGs and ACOM advice Web-Conferences are only available to ACOM members and participants in the ADGs and Web-Conferences. ACOM was invited to discuss if the minutes should be made public available

What seems to have brought this item to ACOM’s agenda is a perception by some people that the current system is not sufficiently transparent as ADGs or web-conferences can sometimes make changes to the advice but the documentation explaining the reason for these changes is not always in a document publicly available.

The Subgroup did not manage to reach a conclusion on this; several people clearly felt the minutes should be public (for transparency purposes), whereas others were not convinced that this was useful (considering instead the minutes as internal working documents).

The Subgroup agreed that 3 options could be entertained by ACOM:

- A. Continue with current system, i.e. minutes are available on the SharePoint and all observers that participated in a given process have access to the minutes of that particular process.
- B. Minutes are available on the SharePoint and all ICES observers have access to them (rather than only giving access to the observers participating in a particular process)
- C. Minutes are made publicly available – in this case, the names of people or countries providing comments should not be published, only the comments, ensuing discussion and agreed conclusion.

Several Subgroup members considered that transparency and traceability was only achieved in case C, but some considered that A and B were also transparent options. Nobody in the Subgroup felt that making the minutes public would cause any substantial problem, other than a likely increase in workload; it is more that some people questioned the value of doing this versus keeping the minutes merely as internal working documents. The subgroup felt that if an issue is important to be able to understand the advice, the advice sheet itself should explain the issue.

ACOM concluded that there is no need to have those documents publically available. However, those documents should be made available if requested.

5.7 Data calls

ACOM took note of the overview of data calls issued in 2015 in support of ICES advisory work and the feedback provided to the EU Commission on timeliness and data quality provided in Doc 5g.

6 Basis for advice

The ACOM chair, provide a background information of Agenda item 6 that was then addressed by a subgroup and presented in plenum.

6.1 Framework for advice on fishing opportunities:

6.1.1 MSY approach category 3 and 4 stocks (WKLIFEV);

Carl O'Brien presented the report of WKLIFEV.

The subgroup proposed the following process for implementation of the approach:

- 1) Apply the ADGWW2 methods (with the additional PA buffer, etc.) in 2016 for catch advice for Western Waters stocks with advice due in 2016. For other WW stocks give advice in 2017. Obtain necessary data for other area Cat 3–4 stocks during 2016 and roll this out to all ICES stocks in other areas for 2017/2018. In 2016, if stocks are in an undesirable state, they should receive updated advice regardless of how many years the advice was given for in 2015. There should be another day in the ADGWW2. This will can be used to draft the Technical Guidelines and propose frequency with which stock status should be checked and PA buffer should be applied if status is 'undesirable';

- 2) EGs should consider if the WKPROXY models such as SPICT can be used as biomass models to infer stock trends of cat 1 assessments and where appropriate bring stocks where this is tractable into the advice process over the next (5?) years.

ACOM approved the proposed implementation process.

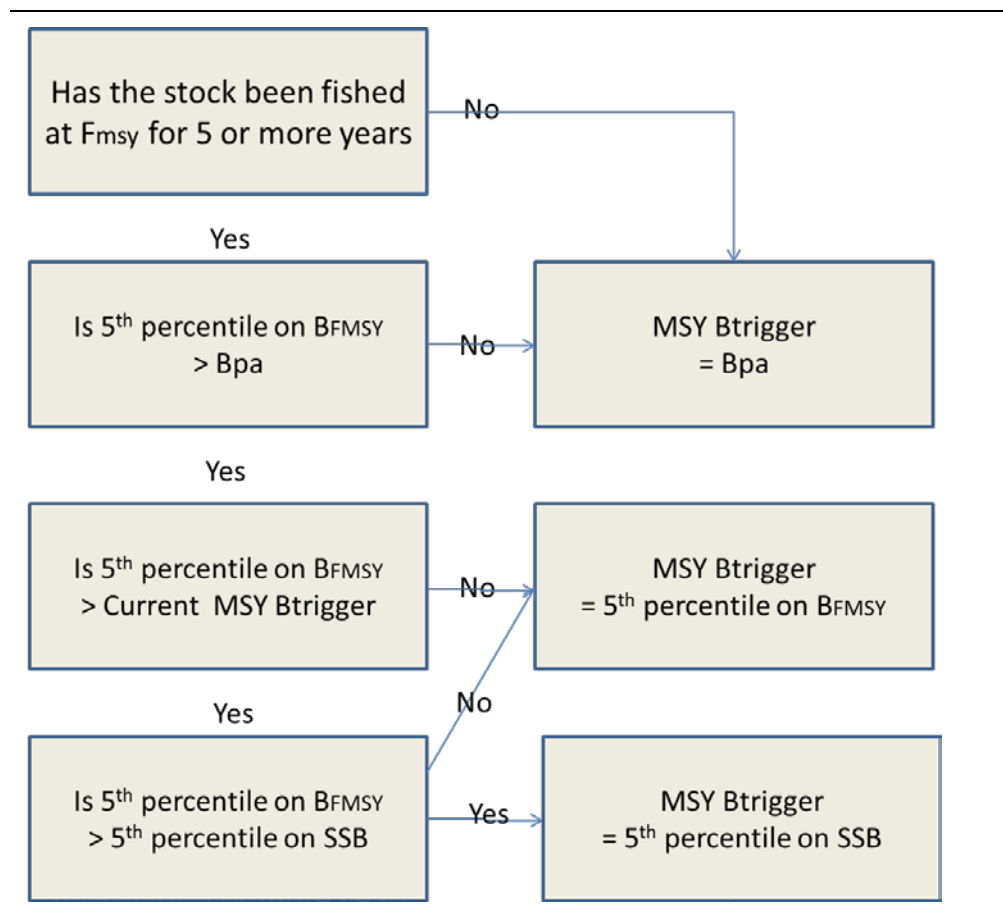
6.1.2 Calculation and basis for reference points including the use of MSY Btrigger reference points in the advice rule (Doc 6aii);

John Simmonds presented Doc 6aii technical guidelines for reference points and the report of WKMSYREF4.

The subgroup discussed the necessity to start a process to adapt MSY Btrigger values. Several points were noted

- ICES should discuss this with clients and take guidance on this. The decision process is not a scientific one, it is a management/client decision. This matter should be brought to MIRIA in January.
- However, ICES needs to explore an advice frameworks with elements that relate to the biomasses that are expected under fisheries at $F=F_{msy}$. This is a credibility issues.
- As part of that discussion ICES should indicate some options (e.g. maintain MSY Btrigger= B_{pa} , switch immediately to 5th percentile on distribution of SSB at $F=F_{msy}$, a transition approach).
- For stocks for which F is still above F_{msy} , the estimate of the 5th percentile of the distribution of SSB at $F=F_{msy}$ is not considered as a reliable value. In that case, a direct switch to a new value of MSY-Btrigger based on the distribution of SSB at $F=F_{msy}$ is not an option.
- Some years with F around F_{msy} are therefore required before the estimate of the 5th percentile... could be used as the new value of MSY-Btrigger.
- Values based on 5th percentile on distribution of SSB at $F=F_{msy}$ are somewhat arbitrary but no other alternative is proposed.

Based on the discussions in the subgroup ACOM agreed implementation of a consistent approach to estimate MMS Btrigger as shown in the flow-chart below.



SSB is the SSB in the last assessed year.

Where BFMSY is the expected equilibrium biomass when fishing at FMSY

If the assessment does not have intervals on SSB the commonly used ICES CV of 20% giving 5 percentile at SSB/1.4 should be used.

MSY Btrigger is expected to be reduced by this process only if the new estimate of the 5 percentile on BFMSY is lower than a previous estimate.

6.1.3 Technical guidelines

ACOM took note of the progress in developing the technical guidelines and underlined the need to give priority to finalize and make them available.

6.2 Framework for advice on ecosystem impacts of fisheries

ACOM was invited to discuss the need for an ICES framework for advice on ecosystem impacts of fishing and aquaculture activity and if a need is identified to agree on a process to develop the framework.

The subgroup did not think ICES was at the state in providing advice to be able to draft such a framework. ICES can state the areas of work/policy issues with links to ICES advice on these issues. It was agreed to contact WGECCO to ask the group to consider the issue.

Action: WGEKO_2016 should have a ToR regarding developing a framework for ICES. The ACOM leadership was requested to contact the chairs of WGEKO to discuss how the group may contribute to the development of a framework.

6.3 Introduction to advice

A draft revised introduction to advice taking into account the development of the technical guidelines and the introduction of the fisheries and ecosystem advice was tabled. ACOM was invited to discuss the draft and agree on the process to finalise the introduction.

ACOM found the draft introduction unclear in terms of who it is intended for and the purposes it was supposed to serve.

ACOM agreed that:

- Short term. Although the draft is not ideal, it can be published with some revisions). Table 1.2.1 and 1.2.2 are too technical. Table 1.2.2.4 needs some simplification on the text and should not include equations.
- Medium term. Simplify the Introduction and include links to the technical document. The basic definitions of reference points (in plain English) should definitely be included. The text of the Introduction shouldn't be edited by ACOM, but by the Communications team at the Secretariat.

7 Format of advice.

The ACOM chair, provide a background information of Agenda item 7 that was then addressed by a subgroup and presented in plenum.

7.1 Review of single stock advice sheets;

7.1.1 Pictogram

The F-ranges do not fit with current pictograms definitions and they could also signal 'future action'.

The rules that we use for the pictograms were questioned.

It was underlined that the pictograms represent an assessment of the state of the stock and its exploitation and not an advice for management decisions.

ACOM concluded that the pictograms should be maintained and that the rounding needs clarification. ACOM furthermore agreed not to reopen this issue for a number of years since there is not agreement on a new proposal.

7.2 Fisheries advice

ACOM was invited to review Doc 7b and agree on how to move forward on developing the fisheries advice for all eco-regions.

The subgroup considered that the fisheries advices at this stage are overviews rather than advice and that they should be referred to as fisheries overviews. Substantial work would be required to finalise the overviews.

The subgroup made a number of comments and suggestions of relevance for the future work and suggested the following process to finalise the overviews. Proposed process forward:

1. Discuss with customers needs and purposes,
2. Set up workshops by ecoregion supported by standard data products from Secretariat,
3. ADG / WC process to finalise,
4. Update text every 3 years and figures annually.

ACOM agreed to give priority to finalisation of the fisheries overviews and requested the ACOM leadership to set up a process aiming at issuing overviews by ecoregions in 2016. The leadership was furthermore requested to consult clients and stakeholders on the usefulness of the planned overviews.

Action: ACOM requests the ACOM leadership to consult clients and stakeholders on fisheries overviews and to set up a process to finalise the overviews in 2016.

7.3 Ecosystem overviews

ACOM was invited to review the draft ecosystem overviews and the draft advice on DCF indicators 5, 6, 7.

The subgroup concluded that:

- Roadmap to publication: The Ecosystem Overviews must be agreed by ACOM in the same manner as Book 1 of the ICES Advice.
- Focus should also be on the operational products to underpin the description of the environmental key drivers, state of ecosystem components and anthropogenic impacts that broadly influence each regional ecosystem.
- List gaps in knowledge and provision of operational products required to regularly update the Ecosystem Overviews. Decide on the best update cycle to support the ICES advice, MSFD and RSC assessments.
- Decision is needed on the position (on ICES website) for the Ecosystem Overviews interactive figure and the strategic use of links to c.1) give visibility to IEA groups c.2) MSFD ICES products.

ACOM agreed to give priority to the finalization of the overviews and requested the ACOM leadership to follow up.

Action: ACOM requested the ACOM leadership to ensure the finalisation of the four draft overviews in the beginning of 2016 and that references to the main sources of information and data are included. The leadership was furthermore requested to oversight the finalisation of overviews for the remaining ecoregions.

7.3.1 DCF Indicators: Process to approve.

ACOM discussed the draft advice for DCF indicators 5, 6 and 7. It was agreed to set up a WC in December to approve the advice. (The advice was approved on 13th December 2015).

8 ACOM/SCICOM Joint Steering Groups and Strategic Initiatives.

8.1 Report of Joint Steering Groups

8.1.1 SSGIEA

Dave Reid gave a short overview of activities within SSGIEA and presented the idea and ToRs for WKDEICE. He used WKIRISH as an example of an initiative involving both the advisory and the science part of ICES.

8.1.2 SSGIEOM

Nils Olav Handegard highlighted in his presentation report of SSGIEOM ACOM's responsibility to ensure feedback into the survey planning and data groups on data needs, quality, and other issues emerging from the advisory work of ICES. There was a general agreement that the link between data collectors and data users need to be strengthened and that this is a task for both ACOM and SCICOM. The ACOM leadership was requested to follow up.

8.1.3 Benchmark Steering Group

The BSG chairs provided an updated of recent activities linked with benchmark preparation. The discussion of BSG is reflected in section 5.2.

9 Recommendations from expert groups to ACOM

As small subgroup reviewed the recommendations, with the view to ensure that action was taken to address the recommendations. The subgroup reported back to ACOM that recommendations had been addressed and no specific action from the Committee was required.

10 Advisory Workplan 2016

The secretariat presented the advisory workplan for 2016, with emphases on how and where to find the information on the advisory processes in 2016.

10.1 Requests for advice

No issues were raised.

10.2 ToRs for ACOM and joint ACOM/SCICOM expert groups. New TORs and follow up on decisions taken at ACOM Web-Conference 19 October 2014

A resolution forum will be established for the approval of all ACOM and SCICOM resolutions. The site will be in place by January 2016 and all members will be alerted on new posts and comments on the site.

ACOM do seldom interfere with the Resolutions. It was questioned whether ACOM is dealing with them appropriately. The Scallop WG was especially discussed as an example of a group which ToRs needed some reflection by ACOM.

ACOM agreed that there is a need for better overseeing the Resolutions. Maybe a special ACOM subgroup should be set up.

Action: ACOM requested the ACOM leadership to develop a proposal for a structure for ensuring draft resolutions are addressed appropriate.

WGSCALLOP ToRs be considered by the Secretariat together with the WG Chair.

10.3 Stock assessors and coordinators

No big lack of stock assessors and coordinators were identified.

10.4 ADG

A list of 2016 Advice Drafting Groups was presented, to fill all posts as ADG Chairs the ACOM Chair would approach ACOM members directly.

As agreed under item 5.2 ACOM was requested by 15 January 2016 to provide a list of 2016 ADG participation from their respective countries. If members after that were still needed for some ADGs the ACOM Chair will ask specific countries to nominate members for those groups.

10.5 Meetings with Recipients, ToR and agenda for MIRIA

The ToRs for this meeting were approved.

It was emphasized that the meeting is not only for clients but also for member countries. ACOM was asked to encourage their respective countries to attend this meeting.

10.6 Meetings with stakeholders, ToRs and agenda for MIACO

The ToRs for this meeting were approved.

10.7 Meeting with chairs (WGCHAIRS) (Doc 10g);

The ACOM Chair informed that the minutes of the ACOM meeting will form the basis for the WGCHAIRS and encouraged ACOM to come forward issues to be addressed at WGCHAIRS.

10.8 Scheduling ACOM meeting at ASC.

In connection with the 2016 ICES Annual Science Conference ACOM will meet for a whole day meeting on Sunday 18 September in Riga, Latvia.

11 Delimitations of Divisions IIIa/d and Sub-divisions 22/24

Anna Osypchuk gave a presentation of a number of issues related to ICES statistical areas, their definitions and referencing.

11.1 Border definition between Kattegat and Skagerrak and North Sea

Currently, there is no operational definition of statistical areas for Skagerrak and Kattegat that are treated as a merged Division 3.a. As an outcome from the DG MARE-ICES-Norway meeting regarding the issue, ACOM was requested by to provide scientifically most relevant official definitions for statistical Sub-divisions Kattegat and Skagerrak. Alternative borders for Skagerrak/North Sea and Skagerrak/Kattegat were presented and discussed. It was mentioned that keeping the

current definition of Skagerrak/North Sea border is important for continuation of time series in catch statistics.

An ACOM subgroup was established to address this issue. The group suggested that: a) the split between the Kattegat and the Skagerrak should be according to the EC TAC border; b) the split between North Sea and Skagerrak should be changed to the diagonal line (not the ICES rectangle delimitation). This should be in force after 1st January 2016.

ACOM endorsed the suggestion from the subgroup. It was also agreed that new area references will be: Subdivision 20 for the Skagerrak and Subdivision 21 for the Kattegat.

11.2 Belt Sea/Baltic West of Bornholm delimitation and denomination

Area definitions currently used for Divisions IIIb, c, and d originate from the ICES C.M 1987/D:22 Statistics Committee report “An updated description of the ICES statistical area (North), statistical sub-areas, divisions, and sub-divisions”. The document has inconsistency in definition of border line between Divisions 3.b/c and 3.d compare to the border line between Sub-divisions 3.b.22 and 3.d.24. It was suggested to align definition for the divisions according to the definition of sub-divisions that are currently applied in maps and data collection.

ACOM agreed that the definition of Divisions 3.b/c and 3.d is in line with the SD 22 and 24 border line.

11.3 Division 27.3.d validity

In ICES 2004 document on ICES area definitions [Proposal for additional reporting areas under the STATLANT programme in FAO area 27. 16 March 2004. ICES] there was introduced an unintended error, where division 3.d was marked as defunct. It is suggested to change the status of the division back to active.

ACOM agreed that the validity of division 3.d should be restored

11.4 Area referencing – countries

In the present area definitions for the Northeast Atlantic hosted by FAO, outdated country references are used with the following note: “Whenever in the text reference is made to the former (i) Federal Republic of Germany, (ii) German Democratic Republic and (iii) USSR, these country names should be intended to refer to the present Germany after unification in 1990 and to the present Russian Federation.” It was suggested that the note should be removed, and all the country references updated through all area descriptions respectively. FAO should be informed accordingly.

ACOM agrees that the country references are updated and FAO should be informed accordingly.

11.5 Area referencing – area coding

Historically, ICES applies Roman numbers and letters in area referencing. Digitalizing these references is rather inconvenient, so many organizations referring to ICES areas are applying area references with use of Arabic numbers and Latin letters, and with applying the complete hierarchical structure for reference (like 27.5.b.1.b or

27.3.d.28.1). Therefore, it is suggested to revise ICES code referencing to make it more transparent and contemporary.

ACOM agreed to revise the area referencing and to apply the new references as soon as possible. If it does not change the context, prefix 27 can be omitted in the documents, but will still be applicable in the databases and datasets.

11.6 Area referencing – reference point document

ICES is the originator of definitions for statistical areas in the FAO area 27. In the meantime, ICES does not have a reference point, where area definitions could be seen. All definitions are scattered in various reports and proposals. The only list of definitions available online is hosted by FAO. Therefore, it is suggested, to create an ICES web-page where all area definitions and references for ICES statistical areas would be stored.

ACOM agreed with the proposal. The Data Centre should prepare and publish an online document with a good overview of area definition.

12 ACOM Workplan 2016 (Doc 12).

The ACOM Chair summarised the action points agreed at the meeting and concluded that the main points of the 2016 workplan for ACOM were:

- 1) Frequency of assessments.
- 2) The role of Expert Groups and the link with Benchmarks.
- 3) Reopening of advice.
- 4) Transparency of the advisory process.
- 5) Technical guidelines.
- 6) Introduction to advice.
- 7) Framework for ecosystem impacts of fisheries.
- 8) Data – link between data collectors and data users.
- 9) Fisheries overview/advice.
- 10) Ecosystem overviews.
- 11) Resolutions.

13 ACOM Panel for the recruitment of the ACOM Chair 2017 – 2019.

The Council agreed that the Bureau should establish a Recruitment Panel (RP) in November-December 2015 to oversee the entire process for the recruitment of the new ACOM Chair, according to the procedure suggested by CAWGSAL:

A recruitment panel will be established with the following membership: Three ACOM members selected by ACOM of which one is appointed by ACOM as chair of the panel, two members of Bureau selected by the Bureau, the General Secretary, and the Head of Advisory Support. The outgoing Chair of ACOM cannot be appointed as member.

At the Council meeting this was expanded a little to the effect that:

- A SCICOM representative should be included in the recruitment and review panel.
- That the recruitment panel is set-up in advance, to oversee the ACOM Chair job description and to have the responsibility for the process all the way through.
- Bureau will be the main entity responsible for the entire process

ACOM was invited to appoint a chair and two members of the recruitment panel.

Maurice Clarke, Joanne Morgan, Natalie Stein were appointed by ACOM for the recruitment panel and Maurice Clarke was selected to Chair the panel.

14 AOB

No AOB items were raised.

15 Closing

The Chair closed the meeting at 13:00 on 4th December.

Annex 1 – List of participants

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Annex 2 – Draft agenda

Welcome

- 1) Adoption of agenda (Doc 01).
- 2) Review of membership.
- 3) Minutes from ACOM Consultations (Doc 03).
- 4) Review of 2015
 - a) Chairs report to ACOM (Doc 04a);
 - b) Council meeting October 2015 (Doc 4b);
 - c) ACOM members review.
- 5) Advisory process.
 - a) Frequency of assessment;
 - b) Expert groups – Benchmark processes;
 - c) Guidelines on handling of late data submission;
 - d) ADGs;
 - e) Advice reopening procedure and requests for update of advice;
 - f) Transparency
 - i) dialogue with observers;
 - ii) ADG and Web-conference minutes.
 - g) Data calls.
- 6) Basis for advice
 - a) Framework for advice on fishing opportunities
 - i) MSY approach category 3 and 4 stocks (WKLIFEIV);
 - ii) Calculation and basis of reference points including the use of MSY Btrigger reference points (estimated using the “5% lower interval on Bmsy approach”) in the advice rule (Doc 6aii);
 - iii) Technical guidelines (Doc 6aiii);
 - b) Framework for advice on ecosystem impacts of fisheries (Doc 6b);
 - c) Introduction to advice (Doc 6c).
- 7) Format of advice
 - a) Review of single stock advice sheets;
 - i) Pictogram (Doc 7ai and 7aii);
 - b) Fisheries advice (Doc 7b);
 - c) Ecosystem overviews (Doc 7c).
- 8) ACOM/SCICOM Joint Steering Groups and Strategic Initiatives.
 - a) Report of Joint Steering Groups (Doc 08a-1, 08a-2 and 08a-3);
 - b) Report of Strategic initiatives (Doc 08b-1, 08b-2);
- 9) Recommendation from EG to ACOM (Doc 9).
- 10) Advisory Workplan 2016
 - a) Requests for advice;
 - b) ToRs for ACOM and joint ACOM/SCICOM expert groups. New TORs and follow up on decisions taken at ACOM Web-Conference 19 October 2014. (Doc 10b);
 - c) Stock assessors and coordinators (Doc 10c);

- d) ADG (Doc 10d);
 - e) Meetings with Recipients, ToR and agenda for MIRIA (Doc 10e);
 - f) Meetings with stakeholders, ToRs and agenda for MIACO (Doc 10f);
 - g) Meeting with chairs (WGCHAIRS) (Doc 10g);
 - h) Scheduling ACOM meeting at ASC.
- 11) Delimitations of Divisions IIIa/d and Sub-divisions 22/24 (Doc 11).
 - 12) ACOM Workplan 2016 (Doc 12).
 - 13) ACOM Panel for the recruitment of the ACOM Chair 2017 – 2019.
 - 14) AOB
- Closing