

**MIAC – Annual coordination meeting ICES- ACs  
12<sup>th</sup> January 2023  
Copenhagen, ICES Headquarters and online  
Report**

**PLEASE NOTE:** *This short report highlights the BSAC related issues discussed during the meeting*

*(minutes of the meeting will be prepared by CCRUP)*

## **1. Welcome by the chair and introductions**

**Gualberto Rita, Chair of the CCRUP** welcomed the ICES representatives as well as the representatives from different ACs. He chaired the meeting. He thanked ICES for facilitating the meeting.

**From BSAC** were present Jarek Zieliński the ExCom Chair, Lise Laustsen the Chair of the Pelagic Working Group, Guillaume Carruel the Executive Secretary and the Rapporteur.

## **ACs general issues**

### **In-person participation of ICES to ACs meetings**

*The issue was raised during the MIAC meeting in June 2022. The ACs had appreciated the involvement with ICES, however they found unsatisfactory to hear that there will be no in person presentation of ICES advice. ICES was asked to consider joining the ACs in-person again for those key meetings when the ICES advice is presented.*

**The meeting** discussed in-person participation of ICES representatives to AC meetings.

**The ICES representative** referred to the discussions held at MIAC and MIACO in 2022, with regard to the in-person participation of ICES representatives in AC meetings. He underlined that ICES supports policies aimed at reducing CO2 emissions. Therefore, the number of physical meetings and in-person participation of ICES representatives has been reduced. However, the ICES ACOM vice-chairs are ready to participate in one physical meeting per year. Another option could be to have a presentation of the ICES advice for all the ACs during a joint meeting.

**The AC representatives** underlined that the presentation of ICES advice is of key importance for the ACs in preparing their recommendations on the fishing opportunities. They appreciated the ICES proposal to have one in-person meeting with ACs during the year. Some ACs expressed the opinion that the presentation of the advice remain region - specific.

**The BSAC Executive Secretary** asked whether ICES could have an in-person presentation at the BSAC Joint Working Group meeting in June. This should be facilitated by the fact that the meeting will take place in Copenhagen.

**The ICES representative** replied that the ICES advice 2023 could be presented by someone from the ICES Secretariat if no ACOM vice-chair was available during the BSAC meeting in Copenhagen.

### **ACs specific issues**

***Questions put forward by the BSAC before the MIAC meeting.  
Replies by ICES representatives during the meeting***

### **BSAC : Question of ecosystem considerations in stocks advice of the Baltic**

*Last year, BSAC asked several questions pertaining to of the inclusion of ecosystem factors in the single stock assessments of cod, sprat and herring. It was unclear how seal predation was taken into account in the advice. ICES was also asked to come back to the BSAC on the sprat predation on cod eggs in the eastern Baltic. Furthermore, ICES ADG member, Jan Horbowy's analysis shows that reduction of natural mortality of cod is the key driver needed to restore the eastern Baltic cod stock. What recommendations does ICES have for implementing this? How can managers reduce natural mortality of the cod stock?*

**Answer from ICES** (Henn Ojaveer ACOM vice chair)

The question pertains to 3 topics:

1. **Seal predation**

The impact of seal predation on cod has not yet been included in the advice. However, the importance of cod in grey seal diet has already been assessed. Grey seals are distributed in the entire Baltic and cod is mainly found in the south. Work is ongoing on updating data on seal stomach content (available data is from 2016 and is not applicable in the current situation) assessing the effect on cod biomass. Work is ongoing but is not yet ready to put in the assessment model. ICES experts are working on models and collecting new evidence to further quantify the importance of cod in seal diet.

2. **Sprat predation on cod eggs**

Sprat predation on cod eggs is one of many factors determining cod recruitment. Hydrographic conditions are also very important. Sprat predation on cod eggs depends on sprat quantities but also depends on the prey (abundance of cod eggs). Experts are of the opinion that reduced sprat abundance will not necessarily lead to better recruitment of cod.

3. **Natural mortality of cod and poor condition**

Biological changes in the stock are the main driver. Natural mortality has increased and is now higher than fishing mortality. Cod is affected by natural conditions such as oxygen deficiency and prey availability. Sprat is geographically distributed in the north of the Baltic whereas cod is distributed in the south. Parasite infestation of cod is also a driver of natural mortality. It is however unclear if it is a cause or an effect of poor condition of cod.

Present productivity will remain at low level even in the absence of fishing. Science is investigating these complex issues (eutrophication, climate change, O<sub>2</sub> and seal abundance) and it is impossible to quantify the ecological effects.

### **BSAC: Headline advice use for Western Baltic spring spawning herring**

*The BSAC has been preoccupied by this stock for some time. It has asked the Commission to request ICES to change its headline advice and use the Baltic MAP as headline advice. **Was this request received by ICES? Will this be the case this year? Is there any useful information for the future elaboration of a rebuilding plan for this stock coming from the workshop on guidelines and methods for the evaluation of rebuilding plans (WKREBUILD)?***

*The Commission has also indicated in a letter to BSAC on 21/12 that the EU NO UK delegation had agreed to send a request to ICES about an evaluation of a new harvest control rule for herring. In addition to this trilateral request, the EU is likely to submit a request to consider additional scenarios to be evaluated. Has ICES already received any of these?*

#### **Answer from ICES (Dorleta Garcia, ACOM vice-chair)**

The ACOM vice-chair stated that the advice for western Baltic spring spawning herring is based on MSY. The reason is that the stock is shared with Norway, which did not adopt the management plan. As long as there is no agreement with Norway to use the MAP for advice, ICES will continue to base its advice for this stock on MSY. She underlined that the new advice published in 2023 will not include any guidelines on rebuilding plan since the working group on rebuilding plans is planned at the same time as the assessment group. Therefore, new developments cannot be incorporated in the 2023 advice.

### **BSAC: Herring stocks in the Baltic:**

*Following the Council TAC and Quota decision, a number of remarks were made by the Council on the need to better assess size and age composition of the stocks. This is necessary data to implement the Baltic management plan which makes specific reference to take this into account when setting quotas. Did ICES launch any particular work on those topics? How will these questions be addressed? and what are the first results envisaged?*

#### **Answer from ICES (Mark Dickey Collas, ACOM chair)**

The ACOM chair stated that there is a large amount of work going in ICES on Baltic herring stocks. A benchmark will take place in February 2023. A document prepared by the assessment group will be provided to the working group. Age calibration exercise was conducted in 2022 for central Baltic herring. There was a data call on maturity and weight-at-age to reassess time series during the benchmark.

Work is also ongoing on ecosystem interactions, natural mortality as well as distribution and productivity of the herring stock. The European Commission had requested ICES to look into the herring stocks in the Baltic and this request is under consideration.

### **BSAC: Cod spawning depths of 20-30 meters and 30-40 meters:**

*Passive gear fishermen have an exemption for fishing flatfish up to depth of 20 meters. Some of these fishers asked to extend the cod closure exemptions for gillnets fishing flatfish from 20 to 30m depth. Due to the observed increase in water temperature in the Baltic, abundant stocks such as plaice and flounder are found in colder water at increasing depths. This raises questions on whether cod spawns in deeper waters. Does ICES have any more recent evidence regarding cod spawning in SD 25 and 26 at depths greater than 20 meters? Are any investigations of the impact of extending this exemption to depths of 30 and/or 40 meters foreseen?*

#### **Answer from ICES (Henn Ojaveer, ACOM vice-chair)**

The ACOM vice-chair commented on two items:

1. Plaice and flounder presence in deeper waters

The best available science shows that the depth range for cod and flatfish has decreased in recent years not only because of temperature changes but also because of hypoxia and predation risk in the shallow areas.

2. Spawning depth of cod

Cod is unlikely to spawn at depths 30-40 metres because the salinity is low and thus the reproduction success rate is also very low.

However, the use of passive gears in waters deeper than 20m could impact pre-spawning and spawning aggregations of cod. Allowing passive gears in depths greater than 20m will lead in consequence to higher bycatch rates.

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### **MIAC 2024**

**The SWWAC** volunteered to organise and chair the next MIAC meeting in January 2024. This needs to be confirmed by their new Chair, following the elections later in 2023. The BSAC declared that it is ready to organise and chair the next MIAC, if necessary.

#### **Close session**

**The ICES representatives** thanked CCRUP for chairing and organising the meeting.

**The Chair** (CCRUP) thanked ICES and the ACs for good discussion.