Meeting between ICES, Advisory Councils and other Observers (MIACO)

12th – 13th January 2023
Hybrid: physical & online
Chair: Mark Dickey-Collas

Report

MIACO is the annual meeting between ICES advisory councils and other observers. An overview of the advice process and the advice provided in 2022 was given. MIACO was invited to discuss any issues and concerns that had arisen since the 2022 MIACO meeting. MIACO 2023 specifically considered stakeholder engagement, mixed fisheries, MPAs and OECMs, stickleback.

1) Welcome and opening of the meeting.

The ICES ACOM Chair, Marc Dickey-Collas welcomed all participants. He welcomed the new ICES General Secretary, Alan Haynie.

2) Adoption of agenda

The agenda was adopted.
Suggested dates for MIACO in 2024: 11th -12th January 2024, in ICES HQ in Copenhagen.

3) Review of 2022

The Chair presented an overview the advisory process in 2022.

ICES delivered advice for 197 stocks with large increase in MSY approach for data limited stocks and new HCR implemented for others. Advice was also given to 10 special requests. ICES advice is grounded by 10 principles to ensure that it is based on the best available science and data, and is relevant, pragmatic and operational to the policy or management challenge. The basis for the advice is a compilation of relevant data and analysis by core researchers in the field. This analysis is peer-reviewed by scientists with no direct interest or stake in the matter. The basis for the advice including the scientific analysis and peer review is fully documented and published on the ICES website. The process is transparent as all steps in the process are open to observers. The advice is agreed upon by Advisory Committee. The scope of the request is clarified with the requesting party. Scientists are tasked to translate scientific analysis into advice.

New developments implemented in 2022

- 42% of category 3 stocks MP or MSY advice (4% in previous year)
- Revised precautionary Harvest Control Rules widely implemented for data limited stocks
- Benchmark of Vulnerable Marine Ecosystem (VME) methods
- Conservation advice guidelines and implementation for eel advice

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- Communication of mixed fisheries advice revised
- Further implementation of ensemble approaches for stock assessments and forecasts
- Stakeholder engagement strategy completed

Strengthening science in 2022

- New expert group on MPA and OECMs
- Stickleback & round goby in the Baltic Sea
- Small scale and coastal fisheries
- Evaluation & impacts of windfarms
- Further operationalizing EBFM

Questions:

A representative of Low Impact Fishers of Europe (LIFE) asked whether ICES has any data on the retrospective inconsistencies for the Baltic stocks. He underlined that a retrospective bias is needed taking into acount the changes that had occurred in the Baltic.

The ICES representative replied that ICES does not have such data, but work on EBM is ongoing and the changes in the Baltic ecosystem will be considered.

The BSAC Executive Secretary asked what could be expected with relation to Baltic salmon in 2023 advice.

The ICES representative replied that another rollover of the Baltic salmon advice could probably be expected in 2023.

4) ICES and Quality Control

a) General quality control of data

Ongoing efforts and recent development on quality control and quality assurance of data, science and advice in ICES were presented. Quality is a major priority for ICES, as this is key to providing the best possible advice.

b) The data profiling tool

The rationale and use of the data profiling tool was explained to MIACO. The data profiling tool checks and charts the ownership, veracity and accessibility of data use in ICES advice from outside sources.

Krzysztof Stanuch (Polish National Chamber of Fish Producers) referred to the quality of assessment. He underlined the need to include more data from different sources in the assessment. He referred to the impact of seals on cod (such as seal-induced parasite infections) and asked whether ICES had included whether the impact of parasites from seals had been factored in the assessment of the Baltic cod stocks. He also underlined that the results of recent projects on selectivity should be taken into account by ICES in the stock assessment, in order contribute to a more precise assessment of the stock.

The ICES representative stated that ICES does not collect data, but receives data from national research institutes. The benchmark process is aimed at evaluating and improving

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data. Benchmark meetings are open to observers and they can contribute with data. Data from stakeholders can also be provided through national research institutes.

5) Evolving Advice

a) Advice on conservation aspects

Henn Ojaveer, ACOM vice chair presented the advice on conservation aspects, a new element in the ICES advice sheets. For several stocks the key anthropogenic pressures on the population dynamics do not come from fishing (European eel, eastern Baltic cod, salmon). Poor status of these stocks is directly associated with changes in the ecosystems/habitats, or combination of ecosystem/habitat change, and non-fishery related anthropogenic mortality.
Advice on conservation status is only to be given where clear, demonstrable management action can be recommended for any non-catch anthropogenic pressure, e.g. blocked water passage, eutrophication, or other degradation of habitat. It can also be used to highlight clear demonstrable sensitivity to climate change.
Advice on **conservation actions** is provided in case ICES advises non-zero TAC, but a given species is included in conservation lists or if stock appears in the ICES bycatch relevance list, IUCN, OSPAR, HELCOM or other lists.
Advice on conservation aspects is provided for eel.

b) Stakeholder perspectives & engagement strategy

ICES launched the stakeholder engagement strategy:
https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.21815106
The strategy outlines the key principles of stakeholder engagement and defines the roles of both stakeholders and scientists in the engagement. Stakeholder engagement is increasingly important in the work of ICES. Workshops and meetings are organized to consult stakeholders on knowledge needs, methods, data, and, more broadly, their expert knowledge, and incorporate this knowledge into the science and the evidence base for advice. Engagement occurs with experts in the network as well as with the Secretariat and the committees. Fora for engagement on a high level are the meetings with the requesters of ICES advice (MIRIA) and the Advisory Councils and observers to the advisory process (MIACO).
ICES thanked all participants of the workshop on engagement strategy in November 2022 for their input to the final document.
Several participants looked forward to the implementation of this strategy.

c) Update on reference points and rebuilding plans

Dorletta Garcia, ACOM vice chair referred to reference points. Two workshops took place in November 2021 and January 2022. The ICES procedures were contrasted with those used worldwide. Recommendations have not been accepted by ACOM as yet as ACOM agreed that more analysis was needed. The framework & reference points will be tested in a third workshop in the second half of 2023.

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The ACOM vice chair informed MIACO on rebuilding plans**.**
WKREBUILD took place in January 2020. Rebuilding plans worldwide were reviewed. Guidelines to define and evaluate rebuilding strategies were proposed. It was agreed that rebuilding strategies are needed when SSB < B_{lim}. A second workshop will take place in March 2023. WKREBUILD2 20-24 March 2023. It will explore how rebuilding plan elements could be included into the ICES advice rule. The advice rules will be tested in several test cases using a simulation tool specifically developed for this purpose.

Questions:

A representative of Low Impact Fishers of Europe (LIFE) asked whether the next workshop on reference points WKJREF3 will revise any reference points. Would the adoption of possible revised reference points mean that ICES will provide revised B_{MSY} estimates and recommendations of F values corresponding to B_{MSY} for Baltic stocks? He drew the attention to the graph presenting the reference point system with intergrated Harvet Control Rules (from the presentation of ACOM vice-chair on reference points)[1]. In his view, the green "sustainable" zone if far too big. The stock status zone below $F_{trigger}$ and above $B_{threshold}$ is the "sustainable" zone illustrated in green. The orange is "overfishing", yellow rebuilding and red overfished. In his view, the green "sustainable" zone if far too big.
The ICES representative stated that the discussion on how to calculate reference points ($B_{MSY)}$ describing the stock status is ongoing. ICES had been requested by the Commission to integrate information about the age and size distribution of stocks. This would allow advice to capture information from the MSFD, specifically Descriptor 3. This additional information would probably change the size of the green 'sustainable" zone.

6) Renewable energy opportunities and challenges

Jörn Schmidt, member of ICES WG presented the opportunities and challenges of renewable energy**.** Marine renewable development (including wind, wave and tidal) has been steadily developing in Europe and increasingly globally over the last decade. Offshore installations massive increase. The topic is high on the agenda. War and energy crisis speeds up this process. Consultations with fisheries industry are ongoing. A lot of countries start to increase and run impact assessments.
Workshop on Roadmap for Offshore and Marine Renewable Energy to develop roadmap for further activity will take place on 6th -10th March 2023. The intention is to prepare a roadmap to coordinate future ICES work on offshore renewables.

[1] WKREF2_2022.pdf Report from WKREF2: page 12-13
The stock status zone below Ftrigger and above Bthres is the "Sustainable" zone illustrated in green. The orange is "Overfishing", yellow rebuilding and red overfished. zone demarcates sustainable biomass levels above Bthresh, but unsustainable fishing pressure (B > Bthresh and F > Ftrg). The stock is classified to be in the yellow rebuilding zone if biomass is below Bthresh but fishing pressure is below Ftrg so that biomass is predicted to increase (B > Btresh and F > Ftrg). The stock falls in the red "overfished" zone if fishing mortality is above Ftrg and biomass falls below Bthresh.

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High number of features which will be impacted by/have impact upon establishment of off-shore renewable energy facilities. Many consequences were discussed and linking them up made it evident that the interlinkage and complexity is high.

- Fishing methods may develop further in response to the presence of renewables e.g. fishing up close to installations.
- Renewables could impact on long-term stock assessment programmes using the same space.
- As renewables increase compensation to fishers will also increase.
- Seafood security will go up as there will be less wild captured fish but a higher food production (aquaculture) given the higher energy supply.
- Fishing method: Increase in windfarms will increase in the methods for fishing out of need (innovative gears needed).

7) Benchmarks and reviews

Joanne Morgan, ACOM vice chair presented the recent developments on benchmarks and gave an overview of the proposed new guidelines. The ongoing benchmarks are progressing. The new guidelines for benchmarks will enter into force in 2024. The aim is to achieve more clarity, a wider applicability to all forms of recurrent advice and give experts groups more responsibility. The 3 types of processes proposed (expert group, review and full benchmark) were presented to MIRIA. The ACOM vice-chair highlighted the need for regular communication including external communication with advice requesters and stakeholders prior to the benchmark, during and after the benchmark finishes. The ACOM vice-chair asked for suggestions (general and specific) on how to improve external communication.

Questions:

A participant asked about the status of the list of benchmarks for 2023 presented.**The ACOM vice-chair** clarified that the list of benchmarks presented corresponded to the benchmarks approved by ACOM previously. The list of benchmarks for 2024 will be available upon approval by ACOM, after March 2023.
A participant underlined that benchmarks are the most important part of ICES work from stakeholders view, because they are aimed at making sure that advice is reflecting the development of stocks. There is a need for stakeholder involvement when making a decision to carry out a benchmark.
The ACOM vice chair stated that benchmark meetings are open to stakeholders. ACOM and expert groups decide on benchmarks.
The representative of the Fisheries Secretariat asked which benchmark process is the most commonly used? **The ICES representative** stated the inter-benchmark process is replaced by a review process, more in the hands of expert groups.
A representative of Low Impact Fishers of Europe (LIFE) welcomed the implementation of the stakeholder engagement policy by ICES. He referred to the fact that Bothnian herring stock had been benchmarked 3 times in the last years and the quality of data from 10 years

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ago is worse than the current data. He asked what type of data quality assurance is used in the case of Bothnian herring?
The ACOM vice chair answered that a data evaluation workshop takes place before benchmark, to determine whether data fits into the model, we get more scrutiny. If uncertainty on catches we look at the particular case. All data series have uncertainties. Regional coordination groups and science groups contribute with data.

8) Emerging science needs

Presentation of emerging science areas within ICES by **Jörn Schmidt the SCICOM Chair**.

This session focused emerging science topics to address possible future advisory needs. The aim was to identify science areas and best ways of supporting their development. There are short-term, medium-term and long-term science development needs. Short-term operational needs are addressed through the advisory request, propagating through the system. The SCICOM chair referred to the planned workshop on Geo-Spatial Data for Small-Scale Fisheries (WKSSFGEO) and a Workshop on Small Scale Fisheries and Geo-Spatial Data 2 (WKSSFGEO2). The participants were asked to propose emerging science topics to address future advisory needs, among others offshore wind development, carbon sequestration and storage, Marine Protected Areas and other spatial measures, inter/intra species dynamics, climate change effects/stock distributional changes on mixed fisheries advice, risk assessment when producing TAC advice, impact of climate change on specific fish stocks.

9) Overviews- are they advice?

Henn Ojaveer ICES – ACOM vice chair underlined that the ecosystem, fisheries and aquaculture overviews are incorporating more quantitative analysis to strengthen the advice, such as bycatch of protected, endangered and threatened species in fisheries overviews and aquaculture production information in aquaculture overviews. Ecosystem overviews are key products to support EBM.

Ecosystem overviews (11 new ones coming): there is a new process based on wire diagram, which includes three steps: evaluating what the pressures are, based on the human activities causing those pressures and the state of ecosystems affected by those pressures (i.e. establishing the linkage framework); performing a risk assessment for all those linkages from step 1 on both a semi-quantitative and quantitative basis, analysis to create the wire diagram, by converting categorical scores to numerical scores to evaluate the impact risk score per each linkage chain.

Fisheries Overviews: the most important revisions include (they are updated annually): quantification of bycatch of protected, endangered and threatened species (PETS) and mixed fisheries advice considerations.

Questions:

The NSAC representative drew the attention that the ecosystem overview for the North Sea starts with a sentence that fishing continues to be the main threat to ecosystem health.

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He agreed that fishing is still the main pressure for some stocks but at the same time asked ICES to consider revising this is very negative introductory statement.

10) What messaging from ICES helps deliver your objectives?

The ACOM Chair referred to the fact that ICES has a communications strategy to deliver its objectives, but at same time values input from stakeholders. He asked the participants which elements of ICES work would benefit from further communication and promotion.

The BSAC ExCom Chair stated that from the BSAC perspective, the most important aspect of ICES communication is participation of its representatives in meetings with the stakeholders, in order to present and explain the advice.

Another participant agreed that there is a need for more background to the advice. He welcomed the conservation advice related to specific measures that could be taken with regard the stock in poor consition, such as for example eel. **The NWWAC representative** stated that the ACs appreciate the possibility to take part in ICES working groups.

11) Mixed Fisheries

The ICES ACOM vice chair informed that the style and communication of mixed fisheries advice changed in 2022. The changes included a new plot in the fisheries considerations:

- *"Maximum (max)":* fishing stops when all stocks have been caught up to the fleet's stock shares.
- *"Minimum (min)":* fishing stops when the catch for any one of the stocks meets the fleet's stock share.
- *"Status quo effort (sq_E)":* the effort of each fleet in the catch advice year (2023) is set equal to the average effort in the most recent three years (2019–2021).

The objectives of the scoping workshop on mixed fisheries WKMIXFISH2 in March 2023 are to establish utility and useability of current scenario-based approach and identify alternative approaches: steps necessary to transition to advice, potential operational priorities and objectives, identify ways to improve assumptions on plausible fleet dynamics and behaviour, identify key fleet-based information of interest to managers and stakeholders and how best to communicate this information clearly and transparently.

The NSAC representative pointed to the fact that fishers adapt their fishing methods to the fishing opportunities. However, the driving stock is different for different fishers, even if they use the same gear. A generalised approach does not fit here and therefore some ICES conclusions on mixed fisheries advice are not relevant and will not be accepted by the fishing sector. The issue should be further discussed at the upcoming workshop.

The ACOM vice chair stated that one of the biggest problems in mixed fisheries advice is data availability.

A representative of Low Impact Fishers of Europe (LIFE) stated that mixed fisheries advice is more dynamic and adaptive and should also be used for the Baltic. A single-species advice often provides mismatches.

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The BSAC Executive Secretary underlined the importance of mixed fisheries advice for the Baltic in helping the managers to make the right decisions. Last year ICES explained that there was a lack of appropriate data and of expertise to prepare a Baltic mixed fisheries advice. He asked whether any new expertise from the Baltic had been included in the ICES work.

The ACOM chair stated that unfortunately ICES could not find any experts on mixed fisheries in the Baltic in the scientific institutions in the Baltic countries.

The BSAC ExCom Chair underlined that mixed fisheries advice is of key importance to the Baltic. He appealed to ICES and the European Commission to consider this problem and try to find a solution. He proposed to discuss this issue in the framework of BALTFISH.

12) Providing advice in 2023

a) ICES Advisory Work plan 2023

ICES advisory process can be accessed at web site calendar (ICES advice processes) or through share point (login required).

b) Benchmark procedure

The meeting was reminded of the current procedure for prioritising benchmarks and the ACOM review of benchmarks.

Benchmark procedure: The use of best available science and its peer review are core ICES principles. The benchmark process is how ICES brings new science into advice and provides the quality control of peer review.

Benchmarks arise from Expert Groups and ACOM. They are oversighted by the Benchmark Oversight Group (BOG). A prioritization scheme is currently designed only for fishing opportunities. The BOG reviews the results and recommends to ACOM to approve them or not. Final approval lies with ACOM – results must be approved before they can be used.

13) Wrap up and close

The ICES ACOM Chair thanked everyone for participating, in person and online.

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