

Summary Report

Northern Fishing Alliance, Cod Group

Virtual, 8th August 2023

1. In attendance

Mike Park (chair), Michael Anderson, Bill McKenzie, Geert Meun, Jan Birger Jørgensen, David Anderson, Solene Prevalet, Arthur Yon, Rufus Danby, August, Anne Birnie

2. Summary of current situation

MA informed the meeting that the recent ICES advice drafting meeting had been strained and although the output had been positive although he thought there was still some uncertainty on the model itself. He believed there was still some pressure from within ICES to discredit the model.

MP mentioned that he and others had received a briefing on the output from DEFRA, which would suggest that the position is perhaps more certain than MA believed; They were to receive a similar briefing on the same from Marine Directorate Scotland on the 20th of September.

Regarding the advice itself, MA said the assumption of discards had been in line with the assessment the previous year; industry representatives at the meeting argued that the level of discards had been reducing year on year.

The ICES meeting agreed a total stock catch advice of 34,120 t made up of North-western sub stock 21,380t, Viking sub stock 8,818t, and Southern sub stock 3922t.

MA was still critical of the approach given that the only certainty on the various stocks is in Q1, less so in the other quarters. Some thought it a step too far to suggest how the managers should use the information. MP said it was interesting to see that the biomass in all the sub stocks seemed to be increasing.

MP said the question for this group was - given the change in approach regarding the advice had we anything to say on the management of cod ahead of the 2023 negotiations. MD stated that he thought we did especially since all the stocks are above the limit reference points. Cod in the southern North Sea is not what it should be although on the increase, but the other stocks are looking very positive.

MA stated that, in the opinion of the Danish fishermen, a level of TAC should be allocated to area 6a and that the remaining figure should be allocated to area IV and shared between parties using the current allocation keys.

MP said there should be no caution in setting the TAC notwithstanding it's the output of a new model and that future negotiations should be used to negotiate different shares. BMK suggested that pushing for a realistic TAC should be the focus of the group, there is more cod on the grounds now than seen in previous years. There would seem to be a grudging acceptance by ICES that things are improved notwithstanding the advice is for a 30% increase, which is seen as non-reflective of the state of the stock.

MP suggested that going above the advice would be problematic although we should be pushing for the full advice. It would seem reasonable however to question the level of discards used in the assessment. There is the possibility that if an amount is set for 6a then it could be that the amount allocated to area 4 may be the same or less than the amount of opportunities for 2023.

MA suggested that that Denmark would not tolerate a situation where a figure aligned to the increase could be siphoned to area 6. MA suggested that whatever happens regarding reallocation of an element of the TAC it should not impact on the level of TAC allocated to the North Sea. MA suggested full flexibility in the stock for those with a share in it west, this would mean that others were not impacted. He could not see a situation where an element of the Cod TAC was siphoned to an area that some do not have a share of.

MP said there was precedent recently with northern haddock although MA thought it was slightly different given the status of both the east and west fishery for haddock prior to the adoption of northern haddock.

DA mentioned that the output is data driven and the amount of cod set for area 6 should be easy enough to determine given survey results that should be available.

It was mentioned that if the current west of Scotland cod allocation was removed it would further decrease the level of upward movement of the cod advice and would prejudice those fishing the North Sea with no entitlement in 6a.

MA mentioned that there was a technical meeting on the cod advice with managers in London 2nd-4th October. There was therefore a need to hold an early meeting of this group.

3. Next Steps

The meeting concluded that a physical meeting was required to decide on the content of a submission to managers. Some analysis of the situation would have to be carried out regarding the proposed TAC, how that should be allocated between areas whilst safeguarding the North Sea element of any increase.

The meeting agreed to hold a meeting on the 26th of September at Schiphol Airport.

Action: MP to arrange a meeting at Schiphol and to create a straw man paper to build on for the meeting.