

Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization



Report of the NAFO Commission Ad Hoc Working Group on Bycatches, Discards and Selectivity (WG-BDS) in the NAFO Regulatory Area Meeting

15 July 2019
NAFO Secretariat
Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, Canada

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1. Opening by the Chair, Temur Tairov (Russian Federation)

The meeting was opened at 09:30 hours on Monday, 15 July 2019 at the NAFO Secretariat in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, Canada by the Chair, Temur Tairov (Russian Federation). Representatives were present from Canada, Denmark (in respect of Faroe Islands and Greenland), European Union, Japan, Iceland and the United States of America (Annex 1).

2. Appointment of rapporteur

The NAFO Secretariat (Ricardo Federizon, Senior Fisheries Management Coordinator) was appointed rapporteur for this meeting.

3. Adoption of agenda

The provisional agenda previously circulated was revised with the insertion of the new agenda item 4 and three sub-items under Other Business. Also, the word "*Preliminary*" was inserted in agenda item 8. The adopted agenda is reflected in Annex 2.

4. Review of the Working Group recommendations from the 2018 Meeting

The six recommendations (COM Doc. 18-04) were adopted by the Commission (COM Doc. 18-28). The Working Group reviewed the status of implementation of the recommendations:

1. The Commission and Scientific Council, and their subsidiary bodies, as well as the Secretariat, move forward with full implementation of the Action Plan in Management and Minimization of Bycatch and Discards (COM Doc. 17-26).

In January 2019, the Chairs of STACTIC, Scientific Council (SC) and this Working Group had a meeting to discuss the Working Group 2018 recommendations and the implementation of a coordinated workplan in support of COM Doc. 17-23, COM Doc. 17-26 and COM Doc. 18-18. Furthermore, guidance was provided to the Secretariat by the Chairs with regards to the completion of the bycatch and discard analysis (see COM-SC WP 19-01).

2. The Commission considers a means of formal follow-up with Contracting Parties to address non-compliance with the requirement to submit haul by haul data.

At the 2019 meeting, the Commission adopted a follow-up procedure outlined in COM Doc. 18-27. The Secretariat received the missing haul by haul reports from one Contracting Party (CP) upon the follow-up communication. The Secretariat has now received haul by haul reports covering 102 trips of the 105 identified in 2018. Another CP is investigating its three missing reports.

3. Contracting Parties be encouraged to explore with their respective industry representatives the reasons for discards and bycatch.

STACTIC circulated a questionnaire to CPs concerning domestic practices. The survey responses would in part reflect feedback received from industry representatives (see agenda item 6). It was agreed that additional feedback from industry representatives, as available, may be able to further inform ongoing analysis.

4. The Commission includes in its request for advice to Scientific Council at the 2018 meeting the task identified under Section 2.2 of the Action Plan in the Management and minimization of Bycatch and Discards (COM Doc. 17-26).

Request item 6 in COM Doc. 18-20 specifically addressed this recommendation. At its June 2019 meeting, SC prepared its response affirming its role in Section 2.2 of the Action Plan (see SCS Doc. 19-20).

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5. STACTIC reviews existing NAFO observer and haul-by-haul reporting requirements to consider enhancements that would provide specific information related to the rationale for discards.

There is discourse in STACTIC regarding the revision and enhancement of Annex II.M and Annex N of the NAFO Conservation and Enforcement Measures (NCEM) to improve the reporting facility concerning discards. Annex II.M is the reporting form used in the at-sea observers operating under the scheme outlined in Article 30; Annex II.N is the form used by fishing masters in reporting logbook information by haul.

6. The Secretariat, in conjunction with STACTIC and WG-EAFFM, develop tools to cross-reference the relevant FAO-3-alpha code with the VME indicator species, set out in Annex I.E of the NCEM to facilitate their inclusion in observer and haul by haul catch reports.

The Secretariat identified the VME species with existing FAO 3-alpha code in July 2018. The VME species list in Annex I.E was updated by SC in June 2019. In accordance with the SC recommendation, the Secretariat would continue to communicate with FAO to request for the creation of 3-alpha codes for the remaining species (see SCS Doc. 19-20). The WG-EAFFM will meet in July 2019 and is expected to endorse the SC recommendation to the Commission.

5. Review of the data analysis completed by the NAFO Secretariat

In support of Task 1.3 of the Action Plan, the Secretariat, as instructed by the Working Group, performed bycatch and discard analysis of available data, including the haul by haul data (beginning from 2016). The analysis included 1) bycatch and discards quantities, 2) bycatch threshold frequencies, and 3) finely grained mapping on a geographical and temporal scales to identify "*hotspots*" (COM Doc. 18-04).

The results of the analysis, presented in the form of summary tables and maps, are contained in COM BDS-WP 19-01 (Revised). The analysis focused on the bycatch of moratoria species (see Article 6.2.b of the NCEM) of three directed species/stocks, namely 3LMNO Greenland halibut, 3LNO Yellowtail flounder and 3LNO Skates.

The Working Group expressed its gratitude to the Secretariat for its work and satisfaction with the Secretariat's methodology of the bycatch analysis. It afforded the Working Group to identify preliminary trends and some of the data gaps that are needed to be further addressed or investigated. It also recognized the importance of fishery specific solutions given the multispecies nature of NAFO groundfish fisheries.

The Working Group provided guidance on the format and presentation for the subsequent analysis. It also identified specific lines of further enquiry:

- For Yellowtail flounder fishery in 3LNO, quartiles with higher levels can be refined to monthly period to enable the scrutiny of cod bycatch in the months April-July and of American plaice bycatch in June-July.
- For Skates in 3LNO, the analysis should be refined to monthly, instead of quarterly, intervals.
- For all directed fishery species/stocks under consideration including Skates in 3LNO, discards should be identified to species level whenever possible.
- The bycatch and discard analysis should include all species/stocks listed in Annex I.

The Secretariat committed to perform further analysis taking into account feedback and direction from the Working Group on the most recent analysis. The analysis should be available at least 30 days in advance of the next meeting of the Working Group. It was noted that STACTIC is continuing its work on possible refinements to the definition of a directed fishery that would be useful to these discussions and, to that end, they were encouraged to continue that work.

Concerning data gaps, it was noted that the priority of the bycatch and discard analysis has been the moratoria species/stocks and two species/stocks not listed in Annex IA, witch flounder and skates in the Flemish Cap. The Working Group discussed the collection of by-catch data for other species, such as marine mammals and sea turtles, and is seeking direction from the Commission on whether to expand the list of species (from Annex I.C and Annex II.E.VI) for which bycatch data is currently collected.

Additionally, the Secretariat presented an overview analysis of discards for 2018 from the daily catch reports (CATs). The overview is contained in the working paper COM BDS-WP 19-04 which was first presented in STACTIC as STACTIC WP 19-04. Some CPs had questions about data anomalies, particularly for Greenland sharks, between the CAT and Haul by Haul data, and noted that these issues may be reconsidered at a later meeting.

The discard overview is one of the agreed items of meeting of the Chairs in January 2019 (see COM-SC WP 19-01). The Working Group noted the discard overview and its importance as it complements the information gathering under Task 1.3.

The Working Group also highlighted the importance of coordinating with other NAFO bodies, including STACTIC and SC to avoid any duplication of effort and ensure a systematic implementation of the Action Plan (COM Doc. 17-26). A recommendation to this effect was formulated (see agenda item 10).

6. Review of Contracting Party responses to the questionnaire relating to domestic practices for bycatches and discards

A questionnaire was sent out to CPs concerning domestic practices and technical measures used to reduce or eliminate discards. The technical measures include gear selectivity, area closures, and other measures such as move on rules and minimum catch size. Seven CPs provided responses to the questionnaire, which are compiled in COM BDS-WP 19-02 (Rev. 2).

The Chair noted that the survey was one of the agreed items during the meeting of the Chairs in January 2019 (see COM Doc. 18-18 and COM-SC WP 19-01). The Working Group noted the importance of the CP feedback in making informed decisions concerning bycatch and discards in the NAFO Regulatory Area.

7. Discussion of bycatch of species other than moratoria species

The Working Group discussion was held in the context of Tasks 1 and 2 of the Action Plan (COM Doc. 17-26), specifically the continuing analysis conducted by the Secretariat including 3M Witch founder and 3M Thorny skate. A recommendation pertaining to this item was formulated (see agenda item 10).

8. Preliminary Discussions of the recommendations from the WG-PR

At the 2018 Annual Meeting, CPs adopted the recommendations of the 2018 NAFO Performance Review Panel (COM Doc. 18-21 Revised). Consequently, the Working Group to Address the Recommendations of the 2018 Performance Review Panel (WG-PR) identified the lead NAFO bodies implement the PRP recommendations.

The Working Group noted the relevant 2018 NAFO Performance Review Panel recommendations, *i.e.* Recommendations 7, 17 and 18, and the corresponding WG-PR recommendations which will be presented to the Commission for adoption in September 2019.

9. Other Business

a. Greenland sharks

The Working Group takes note of the SC response to the Commission request pertaining to temporal and special occurrence of Greenland sharks (see SCS Doc. 19-20). The SC response indicated data availability and uncertainty issues. In this context, the Secretariat noted that it is looking at the digitization of NAFO at-sea observer data.

In reference to the Commission request, the Secretariat mapped the occurrence of Greenland shark in the NRA based on the 2016-2018 haul by haul reports. It is presented in COM BDS-WP 19-03, for information.

b. VME species

Discussion on the VME species is reflected in agenda item 4 of this report.

c. Status update on the Action Plan

The Working Group recalled the discussions in agenda items 4-7 as they give indication of the status of the Action Plan outlined in COM Doc. 17-26. It was determined that the Action Plan is currently meeting deadlines and deliverables and recognized that considerable additional work already is underway to

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support future year deliverables identified in the Action Plan. CPs noted that initiating related efforts in other working groups or committees at this time may reduce efficiency and delay the important progress the Working Group is making to fulfill the goals and deadlines laid out in the Action Plan.

10. Recommendations to forward to the Commission

To support the continued full implementation of the Action Plan (COM Doc. 17-26), the WG-BDS recommends that:

- 1. That the Secretariat continue its analysis of bycatch and discard information to include all NAFO Annex I.A and Annex 1.B species as well as 3M Witch flounder and 3M Thorny skate.**
- 2. The Commission include in its request for advice at the 2019 Annual meeting, the tasks identified under Section 2.2, particularly on the identification of discard species/stocks listed in Annex I.A and Annex I.B of the NCEM with high survivability rates.**
- 3. The Chair of the WG-BDS continue to coordinate with the Chairs of SC and STACTIC on matters related to the implementation of the Action Plan.**

11. Adoption of Report

The meeting report was adopted through correspondence.

12. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 15:30 hours on Monday, 15 July 2019.

Annex 1. List of Participants

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Annex 2. Agenda

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