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Report of the Working Group on Precautionary Approach

12-13 May 1998  
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## Report of the NAFO Working Group on Precautionary Approach

The Working Group on Precautionary Approach met at Eigtveds Pakhus Copenhagen Denmark on 12-13 May 1998 to discuss recent activities of the Scientific Council as they pertain to the Precautionary Approach, and the possible implications regarding resources managed by the Fisheries Commission. The meeting was chaired by P. Gullestad (Norway) Chairman of the Fisheries Commission with H.-P. Cornus (EU) Chairman of Scientific Council as co-Chair. Representatives from Canada, Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland), Estonia, European Union, Iceland, Japan, Norway, Russia, and United States of America were present (Annex 1).

### 1. Opening by the Chairman, P. Gullestad (Norway)

The Chairman welcomed participants and expressed gratitude to the host Contracting Party (Denmark in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) for the invitation and excellent facilities.

### 2. Appointment of Rapporteur

B. Atkinson and B. Brodie (Canada) were appointed rapporteurs for the meeting.

### 3. Adoption of Agenda

After discussion, it was agreed that Agenda Item #5, originally worded as *Discussion of the Scientific Council Workshop recommendations for their practical implementation* would be changed to read *Discussion of the Scientific Council Workshop recommendations* as it was seen to be premature to consider any possible "practical implementation" at this meeting. After this change, the Agenda was adopted as proposed (Annex 2).

### 4. Introduction into the concept of "Precautionary Approach" and Management

#### a) Presentation by the co-Chairman H.-P. Cornus, Chairman of Scientific Council

H.-P. Cornus gave an abbreviated overview of the information presented to the Fisheries Commission during the September 1997 Annual Meeting. He summarized the characteristics of the Precautionary Approach outlined in the FAO Code of Conduct and the UN Agreement on Straddling and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks. He described the concept of reference points, as well as interpretations of these by Scientific Council as adopted during their June 1997 meeting.

#### b) Presentation by the Chairman P. Gullestad, Chairman of the Fisheries Commission

P. Gullestad summarized how he envisioned the concept of Precautionary Approach as a manager. He considered the concept to not yet be fully defined in that it is still often possible to more easily say what is not precautionary rather than what is. He acknowledged that there is a lot of work in this area internationally, for example in NAFO and ICES, and stressed that there needs to be co-ordination between these groups. He considered that NAFO must prioritize its activities and narrow its scope.

The areas of priority should be reference points and Harvest Control Rules (HCR's), but it is important to remember trade-offs such as economics when discussing target

reference points. He believes that we can be "stupid" but still cautious. There must also be careful consideration of limit and buffer levels of target and by-catch species.

Spawning Stock Biomass (SSB) is perhaps the most important issue at present, and the target should be a sufficiently high SSB so the chance of good recruitment when conditions are right is high.

The Chairman considered that the biggest challenge faced by NAFO is the fact that at present for most stocks the  $SSB < BLIM$ , or  $BLIM < SSB < BBUF$ . Advice is needed from Scientific Council so NAFO is not faced with repeated openings and closings over the coming years. In addition there must be consideration of interactions among competing species, in particular by-catch species.

Considerable discussion followed. Delegates were appreciative of both presentations, and agreed it is important to provide feedback to Scientific Council prior to the June 1998 meeting. A number of different perspectives were put forward by delegates. It was noted that a lack of information should not be a reason to not use the Precautionary Approach and that the information gap should be closed as appropriate. The potential role of buffer points was emphasized in that they provide warnings before we get to the limit points. It was agreed that where buffer points are reached, remedial actions would be taken but that this may not necessarily imply automatic closures of fisheries. It was suggested that the Precautionary Approach cannot mean conservation at any cost; economic and social aspects need to be considered. It was also noted that although discussion had focussed on reference points and Harvest Control Rules, there were other possible precautionary measures such as closed areas, fish size restrictions, gear regulations and effort controls which may also be implemented. The Working Group agreed that in addition to development and implementation of Harvest Control Rules and reference points, other management tools and concepts need to be identified to enable the wide application of the Precautionary Approach within NAFO.

All delegates emphasized the importance of continued separation of the roles of science and management. For example, science should provide managers with explicit expressions of uncertainty associated with the determination of buffer reference points. The importance of consistent terminology between, for example, NAFO and ICES was also stressed.

##### **5. Discussion of Scientific Council Workshop Recommendations**

The co-Chairman H.-P. Cornus presented a summary of the results of the March 1998 Scientific Council Workshop on the Precautionary Approach. He indicated that it still needs approval of Scientific Council and this will take place during the June 1998 Meeting. The requirement for this approval is the reason there are no specific recommendations included in the report at present.

Delegates thanked the Chairman of Scientific Council for the report and discussed various aspects of it. Again the issue of respective roles of scientists and managers was raised and discussed (see item following). It was considered that some specific examples of Harvest Control Rules are needed in order to better understand the meaning of this concept although these are ultimately the domain of managers. Also, we must be careful not to be too rigid because it is important that industry and fishermen "buy into" the concepts.

## **6. Discussion of the Contracting Parties' Presentations on the Possible Management Actions of Precautionary Approach Regarding Their National Experience**

Various Contracting Parties summarized current activities in relation to the Precautionary Approach. The activities included both national and international interactions. Some important perspectives common to all activities included open and transparent discussions, other considerations beyond reference points (closed areas, mesh sizes, landing sizes, fleet capacity, etc.), pre-established control rules, and flexibility to encourage support from fishermen.

## **7. Presentation of Possible Management Actions and/or Management Options for the Stocks in the NAFO Regulatory Area (from the Scientific Council Workshop in March 1998)**

### **a) Relations between management objectives and advice on precautionary approach**

The Working Group was not in a position to discuss specifically possible management actions or the relationships between management objectives and advice during the meeting. Nonetheless, the Working Group considered it important to clarify the respective roles of scientists and managers in the process of implementation of the Precautionary Approach. Therefore the respective roles were discussed and are tabulated in Annex 3.

## **8. Recommendations to the Fisheries Commission**

The Working Group on Precautionary Approach would like to express its gratitude to the Scientific Council Workshop for producing the Report on the Precautionary Approach to Fisheries Management (NAFO SCS Doc.98/1).

Taking into account the broad range of issues relevant for the Precautionary Approach, it is a difficult task to recommend a limitation of future work on the concept. However, taking the Report of the Scientific Council Workshop as a point of departure, the Working Group on Precautionary Approach recommends to the Fishery Commission that priority for the Scientific Council be given to the following issues:

- Standardisation of concepts/nomenclature/abbreviations/definitions between ICES, NAFO and FAO as appropriate.
- Estimation of limit reference points
  - Biomass, specifically Blim and Bbuf
  - Fishing mortality, specifically Flim and Fbuf
- Calculate limit reference points and security margins which offer a high probability of not approaching established limit reference points
- Give the information as reflected in Figure 14a and 15 of the Workshop Report for as many stocks as possible.
- Review the Harvest Control Rule (HCR) concept provided by the Scientific Council Precautionary Approach Framework (SCS Doc 97/12, Scientific Council Report 1997, page 35), considering the respective responsibilities of scientists and managers.
- Give additional examples of reopening simulations for 3LNO American Plaice.
- Continuation of this Working Group as an instrument for a dialogue with the Scientific Council.

**9. Other Matters**

There were no other matters raised during the meeting

**10. Adoption of Report**

The report was adopted after minor modifications by the Working Group.

**11. Adjournment**

The Chair and co-Chair expressed their gratitude to all participants for making the meeting a success. Gratitude was extended to the NAFO Secretariat for their assistance during the meeting. There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 1325 hrs on May 13.

## Annex 1. List of Participants

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## Annex 2. Agenda

1. Opening by the Chairman, P. Gullestad (Norway)
2. Appointment of Rapporteur
3. Adoption of Agenda
4. Introduction into the concept of "Precautionary Approach" and management:
  - a) Presentation by the Chairman P.Gullestad, Chairman of the Fisheries Commission
  - b) Presentation by the Co-Chairman, H.-P. Cornus, Chairman of the Scientific Council
5. Discussion of the Scientific Council Workshop recommendations
6. Discussion of the Contracting Parties' presentations on the possible management actions of precautionary approach regarding their national experience
7. Presentation of possible management actions and/or management options for the stocks in the NAFO Regulatory Area (from the Scientific Council Workshop in March 1998)
  - a) Relations between management objectives and advice on precautionary approach
8. Recommendations to the Fisheries Commission
9. Other matters
10. Adoption of Report
11. Adjournment

**Annex 3. Roles of Scientists and Fisheries Managers  
in Relation to the Precautionary Approach**

Scientific Council	Fisheries Commission
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Determine status of stocks.</li> <li>2. Classify stock status with respect to biomass/fishing mortality zones.</li> <li>3. Calculate limit reference points and security margins.</li> <li>4. Describe and characterize uncertainty associated with current and projected stock status with respect to reference points.</li> <li>5. Conduct risk assessments.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Specify management objectives, select target reference points, and set limit reference points.</li> <li>2. Specify management strategies (courses of actions) for biomass/fishing mortality zones.</li> <li>3. Specify time horizons for stock rebuilding and for fishing mortality adjustments to ensure stock recovery and/or avoid stock collapse.</li> <li>4. Specify acceptable levels of risk to be used in evaluating possible consequences of management actions.</li> </ol>