



Symposium outlines measures to aid cod stock recovery

Cod stocks in the North Sea and North Western Waters are capable of recovery, a major symposium on cod recovery has heard.

The *Symposium on Cod Recovery* held near Edinburgh on 9 and 10 March brought together some of the world's leading scientists, environmentalists, senior EC officials and parliamentarians, fishermen and other stakeholders to discuss cod stock recovery in the North Sea and North Western Waters.

The aim of the symposium – which was organised by the North Sea and North Western Waters Regional Advisory Councils (RACs) – is to push forward new approaches to stock recovery by utilising the wide and varied range of knowledge available. The findings will be used by the organising RACs to provide advice and recommendations to the EC and member states as part of the mid-term review of the current Cod Recovery Programme.

The final agreed recommendations from the symposium will be developed over the coming weeks and months, but a clear picture has already emerged on the course of action and type of measures required to form the basis of a future management plan.

The symposium heard that there has been a decline in cod stocks due to a combination of factors, including fishing pressure, predation, and poor recruitment due to unfavourable environmental conditions.

Of key significance is the broad consensus from many of the speakers at the symposium that cod stocks have the capacity for recovery. However, there is a lack of real time scientific information on the current status of cod stocks, and it was put forward that more resources should be devoted to improving our knowledge. The further development of the already successful fisheries/science partnerships would be one constructive way of increasing this flow of information. It was also recognised by many that there needs to be a more thorough evaluation of the impact of the current recovery measures in place.

Several speakers pointed out that the 'one size fits all' strategy for cod management does not work and a regional approach needs to be adopted, given the unique aspects of fisheries in different areas. For example, there was strong support for the suggestion that the European Commission should take the lead in the setting up of a series of *ad hoc* regional working groups for different cod stock areas, featuring representatives from STECF (EU Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries), ICES, RACs, NGOs and other relevant stakeholders.

In addition, a strong argument was put forward that the future management for cod recovery should focus on reducing mortality rather than trying to meet spawning stock biomass targets. This could be achieved by a variety of management tools including the use of more selective fishing gear and closed areas to protect spawning and nursery grounds.

The symposium heard in some of the presentations that there is a fishing industry requirement for greater stability and that socio-economic factors must be taken into account when developing future management plans. Rather than setting rigid and unachievable targets, it might be more fruitful to adopt an approach that ensures stock recovery is continually moving in the right direction.

Hugo Andersson, Chairman of the North Sea RAC, said: "This successful symposium was the first of its kind and paves the way for new work and new processes to contribute to the future management of cod and other stocks."

Sam Lambourn, Chairman of the North Western Waters RAC, said: "The common thread to emerge from the symposium is that a collaborative approach is needed and that the RACs should take the initiative and be proactive in this process."

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Notes to editors

*The North Western Water Regional Advisory Council and the North Sea RAC are two of seven Regional Advisory Councils, advising on the Baltic Sea; Mediterranean Sea; North Sea; North western waters; South-western waters; pelagic stocks and High seas/long distant water fleets. The RACs were established by Council Regulation and are implemented by Commission Regulation.

The principal aim of the RACs is to bring together stakeholders, including fishermen, environmentalists, anglers, consumers and aquaculture from across Europe, to advise the Commission on matters of fisheries management in respect of the various areas.

The objective is to work towards integrated and sustainable management of fisheries in the wider context of the sustainability of the marine environment and to prepare and provide advice on the management of the fisheries on behalf of stakeholders in order to promote the objectives of the Common Fisheries Policy.

The North Western Waters RAC secretariat is hosted by an Bord Iascaigh Mhara in Dublin, whereas the North Sea RAC secretariat is hosted by the Aberdeenshire Council in Scotland.