

## **SCICOM Chair reviews meeting's success**

**SCICOM met between 3 and 5 May and made progress on advancing ICES scientific work.**

*By: Manuel Barange, SCICOM Chair*

The 2011 spring meeting of ICES Science Committee (SCICOM) took place on 3–5 May at the regional headquarters of the World Health Organization in Copenhagen. The meeting provided crucial guidance to the Chair of SCICOM and to ICES Secretariat for the months ahead. In this brief report I would like to summarize the main issues discussed and decisions taken.

Over the past year, SCICOM and the Advisory Committee (ACOM) have implemented a number of scientific Strategic Initiatives (SI) to develop areas of work that require broad and multidisciplinary engagement by ICES groups and partner organizations. Initiatives on area-based science and management (SIASM) and on Biodiversity science and advice (SIBAS) are now fully implemented, helping ICES contribute more effectively to the science and advisory needs in these areas.

An initiative on stock assessment methods (SISAM) is under development, and should make solid inroads in coming months. In addition, SCICOM has agreed to support an exciting new strategic initiative on climate change and marine ecosystems (SICCME), in partnership with the North Pacific science organization (PICES). The ICES/PICES Science Plan for SICCME was supported by both partners; the initiative will now develop an implementation plan aligned with the IPCC process and the research goals of ICES and PICES.

Finally, the development of coordinated SCICOM–ACOM initiatives includes a new steering group on the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. This group recently started working on the development of a coordinated and proactive response from ICES to assist Member Countries and regional organizations in the implementation of the directive. Many experts groups are engaged in this initiative, despite being asked to engage on very short notice.

SCICOM also devoted substantial time to brainstorming science needs. We discussed how to contribute to a broad, basin-scale vision on ocean observation. There is a vacuum in our portfolio on this topic, at a time when the global landscape appears to lack vision, particularly in relation to biological observations. This discussion will continue in coming months and probably into ASC 2011 in Gdańsk. Realigning ICES structures to ensure that we respond to the rapidly growing developments on the ecosystem modelling front was also debated. As ecosystem modelling provides a crucial link between observing and forecasting needs, this topic will continue to be crucially important in the ICES portfolio.

Planning the events for our own Annual Science Conference 2011 is always an important part of the May SCICOM meeting. More than 400 abstracts have now been received, and the event is shaping up nicely. SCICOM discussed how to make the business meetings more open and interesting to the broad ICES community (and not just the chairs of committees and expert groups), and I believe that you will be pleased with the result. For a taste of what is to come, the plenary session on Monday 19 September will start with a SCICOM presentation of science highlights of the ICES community, and updates of the science programme.

Last but not least, SCICOM spent some time discussing procedures that would ensure that our comprehensive portfolio of expert groups develops in response to the fast pace of scientific innovation. How can SCICOM work with EGs to encourage dynamism and scientific leadership, in the context of the increased pressure on science funding in many ICES countries?

In coming months, some of the ideas will be developed and shared with EG Chairs to ensure that we make the best suggestions with a broad support base. Ideas floating include multi-annual terms of reference with more specific outcomes and mechanisms to encourage the network to restructure groups and focus their challenges every few years. SCICOM also initiated a process of coding of expert-groups terms of reference to evaluate how well we are implementing ICES science plan, allowing SCICOM to focus more on science strategy and prioritization, and less on operational issues.

A recent analysis of the attendance to science expert groups indicates that, in 2010, 1065 scientists attended SCICOM EGs meetings (1325 if one counts participation of the same individual at more than one expert group). This is but one further measure of ICES successes. SCICOM is committed to ensure that present success translates into an even more successful future, and we will continue to work with the community to this end.



SCICOM group portrait, May 2011.