

Baltic Committee Report

Chair: Cornelius Hammer, Germany

The Baltic Committee met on Tuesday, 20 September 13:30–18.00 and on Wednesday, 21 September from 9.00–12.30. About 80% of the official members were present at the meeting.

After welcoming the participants the agenda was adopted and the participants introduced themselves. It was then proposed by the Chair to place all documents for the Committee on the ICES website for download by the participants. Documents becoming available to members should be announced either through the Secretariat or through the Chair. The Chair announced that some issues had come in very late, and would have to be dealt with additionally and apologized for disrupting the official agenda. The Committee acknowledged the importance of this and endorsed the agenda.

Reports of Expert Groups

Report of WGBFAS

The Chair of **WGBFAS** reported (on invitation) on the present state and development of the commercially exploited stocks in the Baltic.

Report of SGGIB

The Chair of **SGGIB** reported on the process of the implementation of GEOHAB in the Baltic. This was followed by a discussion on the possible developments of the SG. After having run for three years now it is time to consider transforming the SG into a WG or, in the extreme, to dissolve it. It was emphasized that out of the perspective of IOC-GEOHAB the work of SGGIB is of very high importance with rapidly growing relevance for the Baltic Sea. It would be desirable to implement a GEOHAB programme in the Baltic. The TORs should clearer formulate the need for a continuation of SGGIB; by no means should the SG be dissolved. It was decided by the Committee to continue the SG for one further year. During this the SG is asked to develop TORs, which justify the continuation of the SG, maybe in form a working group.

Report of SGABC

The Chair of **SGABC** reported (on invitation) on the results of the past meeting. It was concluded by the Committee that the intercalibration exercise was most important both for scientists and technicians. Moreover, the Committee concluded that the age reading problems of cod in the Baltic are far from trivial and will not be solved simply by one or two workshop-intercalibrations between the readers, the individual differences are only one part of the problem. More problems are deeper embedded in the otolith formation of cod in the variable hydrographic environment of the Baltic Sea itself, leading to structures which are not consistent over time and space. Therefore, the harmonization of the age reading is not an act but rather a process. New approaches were initiated by the SG (e.g. weighing of the otoliths, creating data a base, reconstructing historical data, statistical analysis of the age reading in the member states). The Committee is of the opinion that this SG is very important and should by all means continue its work. It is proposed to let the SG grow into a working group, then however incorporating other fish species like herring, sprat and flounder as well. Even though the SGABC was not officially transferred to the BCC, in expectance of this, the Committee endorsed the TOR's of the SG.

Report of WGBIFS

The Chair of **WGBIFS** reported (on invitation) on the survey design of the Baltic and the inherent problems. The discussion focussed on the change of the recent change of survey gear. It was recommended to the SG to intensify its efforts to develop conversion factors and to carry out further intercalibration.

COBALT Project

The project leader of the **COBALT**-project reported (on invitation) on the state of development of cod larvae rearing for stock enhancement in Denmark for the Central Baltic East of Bornholm. The Chair of BCC informed the audience that Germany is also in the planning process of a similar project for the rearing and sea ranching of fingerling cod for the Western Baltic Sea.

BCC Proposal

The ICES Secretariat informed BCC on a proposal to BfN (Germany) for a project for the Management of fisheries in Marine Protected Areas to be carried out by ICES. This proposal was discussed and critically commented by the Committee: The BC was of the opinion that the issue brought forward in the BfN-proposal is of very high importance and significance for all the fishery science, the understanding of the ecosystem, the environmental protection as well as the political bodies. BCC therefore strongly supports initiatives to investigate in the matter of impact of fishery in MPAs. BC is of the opinion, that there are a number of problems adhered to this proposal which cannot easily be ruled out, unless there are specific caveats in the final contract with BfN.

Firstly, to evaluate the impact of fishery in a certain area, highly resolved data from the fishery were required. At present, these data are not available in the ICES databases. Disaggregated data exist at the respective authorities of the member countries, although it is not clear if a project would be granted access to these data and what legal requirements would have to be met to acquire access. Moreover, it cannot be assessed whether these data will suffice the projects' needs for analysis.

Secondly, BCC is of the opinion that there is still a lack of a study group addressing the requirements for evaluating closed areas and seasons with respect to fisheries and ecosystem management. The project would for this reason be a welcomed opportunity to create such a SG, although, as mentioned above, the SG would not be able to guarantee the results as (apparently) requested in the project proposal. In case that access to the data was denied by the member states or the data were insufficient, the SG would inevitably fail. For this reason the BCC does not support the BfN-proposal, unless clear provision was made for this case in the project proposal and the contract. Moreover, it must be guaranteed that results and data obtained by the project are made available for other projects dealing with similar subjects and *vice versa*, data and results from the projects are taken into account by the proposed one.

BONUS-169 Proposal

The Committee was requested by the representative of the ERA-Net BONUS to make extraordinary time available for a presentation of the state of the **BONUS-169** proposal, which is presently developed. The 8 work packages for the period 2007-2011 were explained. It was discussed how this BONUS-169 would fit into the EU-policy and the European Marine Strategy for Regional Seas. It was recognised that the Baltic area would be an ideal environment for setting up such a project. The representative of the project invited the Committee to download the information on BONUS and BONUS-169 from the internet and to comment on it.

Report of SGMAB

The Chair of **SGMAB** reported on the results of its meeting that was conducted in conjunction with SBBFFI, addressing multippecies aspects in the Baltic Sea. The discussion of the Committee centred on the recommendation to include stomach sampling in regular surveys. The following recommendation was brought forward:

Recommendation to Baltic National Labs from SGMAB

Cod stomach sampling 2005/2006

The Study Group recommends sampling of cod stomachs on all standard surveys in the Eastern Baltic Sea. The standard surveys include the BITS survey in March and November and the hydroacoustic surveys in May and Sept./Oct. Sampling every 3rd year or alternatively after an inflow is considered necessary in order to reflect possible changes in the cod feeding due to fluctuations in prey abundances or in environmental boundary conditions. Stomach sampling could start during the hydroacoustic survey in autumn 2005 and continue throughout 2006.

Sampling stations have to be randomly distributed over the survey area. Stomachs should be taken stratified by 10 cm cod total length groups. Measuring the cod to the nearest cm below, the length-groups are <10 cm, 10–19 cm, 20–29 cm, 30–39 cm, 40–49 cm, \geq 50 cm. From each length-group maximally 10 cod stomachs will be collected per station. Cod are processed immediately after the sample got on board. Stomachs that have obviously been partially or completely regurgitated during trawling as well as stomachs indicating trawl feeding are excluded from the analysis. Each individual cod stomach gets an identification number, linking the stomach to the fish and single fish data. For the station at least date, time of the day, GPS position of catch, catch-depth and number of the trawl station are recorded. Recording the number of the trawl station aims at enabling the link between stomach data and catch composition data. All stomachs sampled are preserved in at least 70–80% ethyl alcohol and transported to LATFRA.

The Committee then embarked on a thorough discussion on the review process that was initiated in 2005. BCC had made two scientific reviews on two SGs. This process has met some difficulties as there was:

- a) Reluctance of many approached reviewers to take up the task due to either own time constraints or because they felt not being adequately competent for the task, the latter being the strongest argument from potential reviewers from outside the ICES world.
- b) Insufficient time for finding a reviewer and insufficient time to do the review due to the fact that many EG reports were not finished in a deliverable form in due time before the summer break. Since reviewers request at least six weeks for reviewing, the process needs to be initiated at the latest before the end of June, which is the start of the summer holidays in many places and therefore the request was perceived as very inconvenient.
- c) As a consequence, EG reports coming in later than June will hardly be reviewed at all.
- d) The incoming two reviews were insufficient in so far as for a balanced view of the science of an EG at least two reviews need to be made. It was however not possible to find more than one reviewer per EG in the given time. As a result, the reviews need to be met with caution.

One review was very positive for one of the SGs, the other very critical for the other. While the first was taken by the SG as an encouragement, was the other felt not to consider the circumstances in which the EG worked. The SG had to cope with a lack of adequate attendance and was therefore hardly able to address its TORs appropriately. The Committee was not in the position to reflect on the review and to convert the criticism into new TORs for the SG,

since it felt that not the TORs were inappropriate but rather the attendance. The Committee was furthermore of the opinion that the TORs of all the four SG in support of the BSRP should be critically examined in conjunction with an evaluation of the BSRP. This however is beyond the realm of BCC. Never the less, the Committee was of the opinion that the TORs of all the four SG in support of the BSRP should be examined and perhaps new defined by the end of the second phase of BSRP (now renamed “Baltic Sea Large Marine Ecosystem Project”, BSLME) in two years time, when, at the same time WKIAB will have developed a new research structure for the Baltic Sea (see below).

In this context a non-paper was presented with a proposal for a research structure for the Baltic Sea (Regional integrated assessment and the research organisation in the Baltic Sea within and outside ICES, see attachment). The goal of the non-paper is to design a research structure, which provides the necessary framework, being imperative for implementing integrated assessments. This initiative was born out of the recognition of overlapping character of some SGs and WGs, the lack of coordination, communication and internal harmonization, beyond that what BCC can accomplish. The core of the new research structure consists of two assessment working groups, one for fisheries assessments and one for integrated assessments. These two are structurally strongly interlinked and coordinated. Both these assessment working groups shall define specific study groups in support of their work and for which they will draft specific TORs. Apart from those a series of workshops shall be called into life on a more ad hoc basis to address specific questions since it was felt that such task-oriented workshops are most efficient.

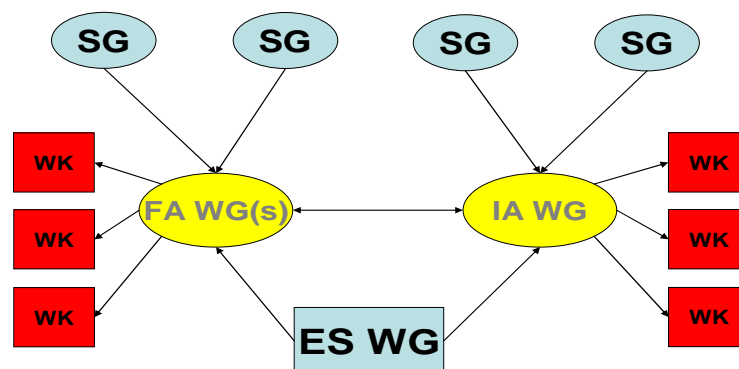


Figure. 1: Suggestion of a new structure for the ICES Baltic Sea assessment and scientific activities. [SG-Study Group, WK-Workshop, FA-Fish stock assessment, IA-Integrated assessment, ES-Ecosystem survey]

BCC discussed this proposal and was very much in favour of it. Knowing however, that this is just a first draft that the devil lies in the detail and that it was clearly beyond the scope of the Committee meeting to clarify all details, it proposed a workshop to define the draft concept better (Workshop on Integrated Assessments in the Baltic Sea, WKIAB). It was felt, however, that integrating environmental parameters into the fishery assessments – which really meets the idea of an integrated assessment and accomplishes the requirements along the lines of the REGNS integrated ecosystem assessment for the North Sea – could not be developed ad hoc. This would require more than one WKIAB meeting. Rather, it was felt that a series of work-

shops would be necessary, and at a certain stage should include HELCOM as well as the BSLME. These organisations need to contribute, not only with manpower, but also in terms of data. It was made clear that the Workshops/Study Groups would need HELCOM and BSLME to be active in this process and input beyond the provision of data only. WKIAB will start the process as soon as possible and develop a new Expert Group structure as provisionally designed in Figure1, based on the experience.

BCC estimates that the sequences of workshops will deliver concrete proposals for a new structure and newly defined study groups in two years time. This is expected to be the realistic time frame, considering the complexity of the matter and coming together with the end of the BSLME project. It is considered appropriate then to have all TORs of all study and working groups in the Baltic re-examine together in the new structure by the newly formed assessment working groups.

- 1) The Chair of **SGEH** presented the results. In the leeway of the positive review for this SG an additional TOR was suggested by the SG to identify the socio-economic mechanisms of marine pollution and to identify ways to reduce pollution. The Committee discussed this issue but remained a little bit indecisive about it.
- 2) The Chairs of **SGBFFI** and **SGBEM** presented the results; the TORs were endorsed without further discussion.
- 3) The Chair of **SGPROD** presented its results. Great achievements were made by performing an ECOPATH workshop and contributing notably to the theme sessions at the ASC in 2006. In TOR f) the first part was omitted, since the Committee felt that developing a workplan for phase II of the project was beyond the scope of a scientific study group. For all the four study groups in support of BSRP an additional TOR was included to take into account the results of the WKIAB, if available. In this context the Chair reported on the results of a questionnaire sent to all ICES group Chairs, investigating the participation of Eastern country scientists in their work. The results show a strong increase in the magnitude and quality of the participation. This is regarded as a document of success for the BSRP.
- 4) The Committee proposes a theme session for 2007 on:
 - a) Ecosystem consequences of harmful algae in the ICES area (justification to come), and
 - b) Marine Biodiversity: a fish and fisheries perspective (co-convenors: Jim Ellis, Remment ter Hofstede and Henn Ojaveer), justification attached.
- 5) The ICES/BSRP Sea-going workshop on fish disease monitoring in the Baltic Sea [WKFDMD] was endorsed without changes.