

Marine Habitat Committee (E)

Chair: Paul Keizer (Canada)
Rapporteur: Mike Waldock (UK)

The Marine Habitat Committee met on Monday 30 September from 14:00 to 18:00 hours, and on Thursday 3 October from 16:00 to 18:00 hours. Thirty-two participants from 12 ICES Member Countries were present, the vast majority attending both sessions. They included 15 members of the Marine Habitat Committee and five Chairs of Expert Groups reporting to the Marine Habitat Committee. The Committee Chair welcomed the participants.

The Chair noted the length of the meeting time was quite short, a total of six hours for the two days, giving little opportunity for discussion. The primary goals of the meeting were to discuss the reports of the Expert Groups and consider the Committee's Draft Action Plan.

Appointment of Rapporteur

Mike Waldock (UK) was appointed Rapporteur.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted with no changes, but some items were re-scheduled, and items 6, Scientific Progress, and 7, Draft Resolutions, were combined. A report from the cold-water coral Study Group was added to item 6.

Overview of the Committee planning process

Initial consideration of Workplan and Draft Action Plan

The Chair explained that the Consultative Committee has drafted the science and advisory component of the ICES integrated Action Plan that is being brought to the Delegates for their approval during this Statutory Meeting. Once Delegates have accepted the Action Plan then the Science and Advisory Committees will have to ensure that the appropriate actions are taken to achieve the goals. This will be a substantial item for the 2003 Committee Meeting since there is a long list of items allocated for the Committee's attention in this Action Plan.

Scientific progress and Draft Resolutions

The following procedure was adopted for the review of the work of the Expert Groups. Committee members had undertaken reviews of the Expert Group Reports based on a list of questions that had been developed by the Oceanography Committee. The questions focus the review on the functioning of the Expert Groups for the purpose of identifying any difficulties that the Groups might be experiencing. These reviews were presented to the Committee and were followed by a brief discussion and, where possible, a response from the Expert Group

Chair or member. The draft terms of reference for the Expert Group were then presented and discussed.

Study Group on Cold Water Corals (SGCOR – ACE)

This Study Group is parented by ACE. However, the Committee welcomed the offer from the Chair of the Group, Mark Tasker (UK), to present its Report (Doc. ACE:05). He recalled that the Study Group was formed in 2001 to respond to a request from EU DG Fish to provide information on the distribution of cold-water corals. Its Term of Reference was to map the occurrence of cold-water corals in the OSPAR region. The Study Group has completed this task and has also reported on trawling damage to corals.

Additional information on corals is being provided by two EU projects, ACES and ECOMOUND. There is also an initiative under way to create a North Atlantic coral research programme.

It was noted that the lifespan of any Study Group should be no more than three years and any continuing work that was required would then be dealt with as appropriate. In subsequent discussion of the operations of the Group the need for links to WGMHM was highlighted.

Benthos Ecology Working Group (BEWG)

Doc. E:07 was reviewed by Frank Almeida (USA). This Group met in Tromsø in 2002 and attracted 29 representatives. However, there was little input from the Baltic States. The lack of representation from Baltic countries is a problem for many of the Working Groups and has a major impact on their ability to respond to requests for work that specifically relates to the Baltic.

The work on the North Sea Benthos Project was proceeding satisfactorily, but in order to facilitate more activity on this Project the formation of a new Study Group has been proposed. Initial progress on the project has been slow owing to taxonomic problems. Solutions have been found to these problems.

Marine Chemistry Working Group (MCWG)

In presenting the review of Doc. E:01, Josianne Støttrup (Denmark) noted that the meetings of this Working Group continue to be well attended although there has been a noticeable decline in the participation of chemical oceanographers. The Working Group maintains good linkages with other relevant Working Groups such as WGBEC and WGMS.

The issue of operational EcoQOs for eutrophication is a task that could benefit from input from this Working Group in the future. The challenge is to develop data

products that would be more useful than the present focus on concentrations of nutrients and expression of eutrophication status as numerical values.

Working Group on Biological Effects of Contaminants (WGBEC)

The review of Doc. E:02 was presented by Lars Føyn (Norway). He commented that the meetings of this Working Group continue to be well attended, but participation from Canada and USA has declined. The focus on OSPAR requests narrow the deliberations of the Working Group to the point where scientists from North America may feel that they have little to contribute to or gain from the meetings. This is a situation that is common to a number of the Working Groups. Furthermore the amount of work referred to this Working Group seems to be excessive so that the members have had to defer some work and other work is not treated as fully as it could be.

It was also noted that while the report of the Working Group was well organised and written its contents were highly technical in nature. The document would benefit from an executive summary that would be understandable to a more general audience. This is a common problem with all of the Working Group reports. A request will be made to all Working Groups to include an executive summary in their reports in the future.

There is a need to develop links between this Working Group and some of the fisheries Working Groups, e.g. with respect to potential population level impacts of observed biological effects. Proposals for two Theme Sessions for the ASC 2004 should help to address this concern. There are also specific requests in 2003 for the Working Group to undertake some collaborative work with the BEWG and the WGPDMO in 2003.

Working Group on the Effects of Extraction of Marine Sediments on Marine Ecosystems (WGEXT)

Santiago Lens (Spain) presented the review of Doc. E:06. He noted that this Group continues to function effectively in providing new information on the structure of marine sediments and usefully drawing from national reports on marine extraction activities, research, systems for permits, and environment monitoring. The Working Group meeting is well attended, but it should be noted that there was only one representative from the Baltic Member Countries, and contributions from North America were by correspondence. The adoption of an electronic form for the national reports has greatly facilitated both the reporting and the consistency of the national reports. This is allowing the Working Group to devote more of its time to the consideration of impact assessment and the development of a risk-assessment approach.

Working Group on Statistical Aspects of Environmental Monitoring (WGSAEM)

Hans-Stephan Jenke (Germany) and Robb Fryer (UK) provided the review of Doc. E:04. They noted that this is a small Working Group, only six members, that has a large amount of work referred to it every year and whose work is critical to many other Working Groups. In fact there are many instances where the work of Working Groups requires assistance with statistical analyses, but the resources are not available.

The present method of operation of this Working Group is not likely to be sustainable. Its activities have become less relevant to the members as they become more involved with monitoring activities directly through other agencies such as OSPAR / MON, the European Water Framework Directive, and national programmes such as the UK National Marine Monitoring Programme. There is a very real possibility that it may have to cease operation. The challenge is to make the work of the Group more relevant for the members and to clarify the role of ICES in international monitoring initiatives.

It is likely that both this and other of the Committee's Working Groups would benefit from overlapping meetings. This would allow Groups such as MCWG to discuss their problems with the members of WGSAEM and at the same time it would provide a better context and sense of relevance for the WGSAEM members. This approach will be discussed with the WGSAEM Chair with a view to implementation in 2004.

Working Group on Habitat Mapping and Classification (WGMHM)

Jeremy Collie (USA) presented the review of Doc. E:05. This newly formed Group enjoyed good participation from most Member Countries. However, to date it has not been able to deal effectively with the HELCOM request for the Baltic Sea owing to lack of representation from Baltic Member Countries. The Group found it difficult to respond to the request to review EcoQOs given the nebulous nature of those currently developed.

Activities have matured to the point where stronger integration with the activities of other Groups is needed. The Group's North Sea habitat mapping initiative is complicated by the plethora of mapping-related activities under way in that area. There are a wide range of techniques being used and a similar wide range in the interpretation and presentation of the data. A major step forward will be the OSPAR-sponsored workshop on habitat mapping in the North Sea in October 2002. ICES needs to be more proactive on these initiatives and following on the comments under WGSAEM above, co-sponsorship of this workshop by ICES would have affirmed the ICES role in habitat mapping and classification.

Working Group on Marine Sediments in Relation to Pollution (WGMS)

In reviewing Doc. E:03 Eivind Oug (Norway) and Heye Rumohr (Germany) remarked that this Working Group had not been functioning well for a few years but appears to have been revived under the leadership of a new Chair. Eighteen scientists attended the meeting in 2002. The Chair and participants are commended for their hard work. Similar to other Working Groups the attendance from Baltic Member Countries was very limited, with only two scientists from Finland. There were no participants from North America. The Working Group made excellent progress during its meeting but suffered some “start-up” problems.

Similar to other Working Groups this Group had difficulty in addressing the OSPAR request on EcoQOs. There seems to be a need for a dialogue with interested parties to develop a consistent and workable approach to defining EcoQOs. The proposed 2nd Environmental Dialogue Meeting may provide the opportunity.

This Working Group has developed a Website (<http://home-3.tiscali.nl/~fsmedes/wgms/>) to facilitate the exchange of documents and information for intersessional work. ICES needs to give a high priority to providing this service for the Working Groups.

The Working Group is tackling the important, but difficult, problem of bioavailability of contaminants in sediments. This work would benefit from collaboration with other Groups such as WGBEC, BEWG, and WGSAM. This general issue of the need for more collaboration should be addressed. The simplest approach would be to encourage overlapping meeting times and common venues for Working Groups and the scheduling of some joint sessions.

Study Group on Environmental Assessment and Monitoring (SGEAM – ACE)

The Chair of the Study Group, Lars Føyn (Norway), presented Doc. ACE:04. Having completed its work, this Study Group has recommended that it should be dissolved. The SGEAM had been tasked with reporting to ACE to help develop the ecosystem approach to management, and a conceptual framework for this was developed. The Group also made strides forward in the area of adaptive management, and as a result of work to date, suggested the way forward was to develop a regional ecosystem approach that compiled relevant material from all Group reports to provide regional ones. Also it was deemed that there was a need for an ongoing ICES forum to exchange views on development of the ecosystem approach to management. A new Working Group should be responsible for compiling ICES data for annual reports.

It was urged that the role of ICES in preparing regional assessments be carefully considered since any approach needs to take into account the limited resources available in existing Groups. There is also a concern that if the

dominant activity becomes the generation of regional assessments then participation by scientists from Canada and the USA will diminish further.

Proposals for new Study Groups

Proposals were received for two new Study Groups:

A Study Group on the North Sea Benthos Project 2000 (SGNSBP) to be chaired by H. Rees (UK). Heye Rumohr (Germany) presented this proposal. It was noted that this proposal fits well with the NORSEPP initiative (see Other Business). There is a need to be explicit about the QA issues, the interaction of ICES with the project database, and links to WGMHM and BEWG activities. The Committee agreed that the proposal should be forwarded for consideration.

A Study Group on Sustainable Exploitation and Conservation of Living Natural Resources of the Coastal Zone (SGSEC) to be chaired by Josianne Støttrup (Denmark). It was noted that the Terms of Reference as proposed were too broad and did not acknowledge the work already done by other ICES Expert Groups in this area. It was agreed that the Committee Chair would work with J. Støttrup and other interested members to prepare a revised proposal that would take these comments into consideration.

Other business

BIOMARE

Carlo Heip (Netherlands) gave a presentation on BIOMARE. This is a three-year programme looking at large-scale and long-term changes in biodiversity. The project uses a network of flagship sites with conditions ranging from reference, largely natural, to other categories of sites that have a current monitoring focus and a variety of other reasons. The scope of the project ranges from Arctic to Black Sea and Mediterranean. The output will have a strong link to management practice and has a wide range of science priorities. Further details can be found on the www.biomareweb.org Website.

As a result of BIOMARE, one area where improvements have been made is in the presentation of the classification for sediment habitats. A new approach has been used, which has linked the communities defined from the data analyses with different sediment types, as reflected in the Folk trigon system used by marine geologists, and with various depth bands. This, together with other major influences, such as the salinity regime, the presence of stones and shells on sediment surfaces (enabling epibiota growth), and the presence of macrophyte and biogenic reef communities, has led to the restructuring of the classification to largely follow the EUNIS system. A

* The Study Group was later renamed as the Study Group on Information Needs for Coastal Zone Management [SGINC], at the request of the Delegates.

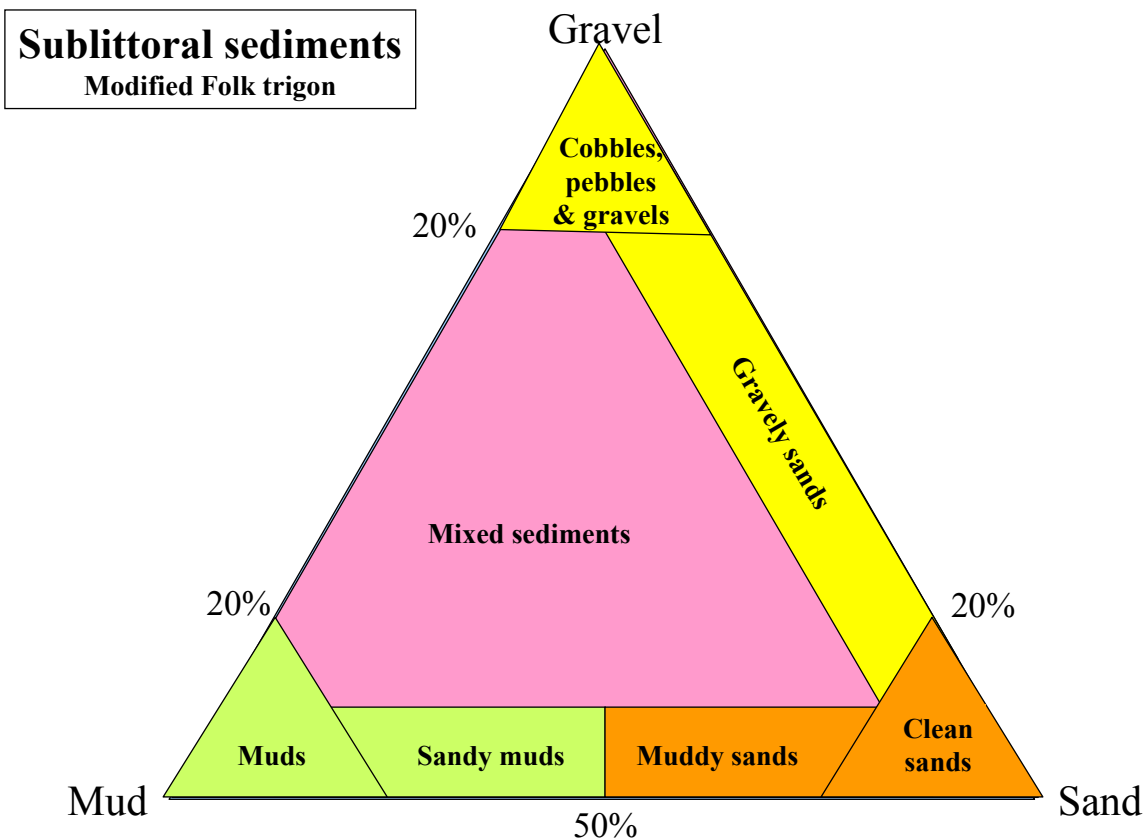


Figure E1. A modified Folk trigon showing main sediment type categories (from the 2002 Report of the Working Group on Marine Habitat Mapping (Doc. E:05))

modified Folk trigon, showing the main sediment type categories, is shown in Figure E1.

ICES/EuroGOOS North Sea Ecosystem Pilot Project (NORSEPP)

Bill Turrell (UK), Chair of the ICES-IOC Steering Group on GOOS (SGGOOS), provided a short overview of the joint activities of EuroGOOS and ICES. A North Sea Ecosystem Pilot Project (NORSEPP) is in hand to demonstrate the utility of ecosystem-based approaches in ICES work. The programme will be based on operational measurements and models to underpin predictive work on ecosystems in much the same way that fisheries managers are already doing for stocks. He will be approaching Chairs of Working Groups to stimulate involvement. He stated that there is a need to capture the plethora of ecosystem initiatives that have started, and focus on deliverables.

Report on activities during ASC 2002

The Integration of Acoustic and Optical Survey Techniques and Marine Biological Data for the Purpose of Seabed Classification (Session K)

The papers in this session demonstrated the rapid evolution of methods, applications, and interpretative approaches in this area. It will be critical for the Committee and ICES in general to keep current on this

topic. Plans are being made to form a new Study Group to prepare an *ICES Cooperative Research Report* that will provide much-needed guidance to potential users of this technology.

Census of Marine Life: Turning Concept into Reality (Session L)

This session included a diverse collection of papers. Of most relevance to the Committee were the presentations on the North Sea Benthos Project. The ICES participation in this project will be facilitated by the proposed formation of a Study Group.

Biological Effects of Contaminants in Marine Pelagic Ecosystems (Session X)

Most of the papers in this session described results from the ICES Sea-going Workshop. Many of the results presented were preliminary but demonstrated a wide scope in the approaches to investigating biological effects. Important work remains to be done on finalizing the analyses and interpretations and in determining the power of the tests used for detecting effects. The overall outcome of the Sea-going Workshop will be the development of a platform for future monitoring and management of pelagic ecosystems and an understanding of the impact of oil production in the North Sea on these systems.

General issues

The role of the Science Committees

There is only a limited time for the Committee to meet during the ASC. Almost all of that time is required to review the progress and future activities of the Working and Study Groups that report directly to the Committee. Even then these discussions have to be abbreviated. The coming year will see the addition of two or three Study Groups that will also have to be reviewed. The Committee has not reviewed the work of those Groups that report primarily to another Science or Advisory Committee, but that also report to this Committee. Currently, the Committee does not have time to discuss the overall direction of the work of the Groups in support of attaining the goals of the Action Plan.

Under the present conditions the Committee is only fulfilling one small part of its role as stated in the Action Plan. Its primary means of effecting coordination or change is through the Terms of Reference for its Expert Groups. Usually only a minority of Expert Group Chairs attend the Committee meeting, and often there are no members of some of the Groups present for the meeting. While intersessional work by e-mail could be used to do some of this work, experience with this Committee and discussions with some other Science Committee Chairs suggests that such an approach is unlikely to be effective.

There are two actions that could potentially result in the Committee playing a more effective role:

- Allow for an additional half-day for the Committee to meet during the ASC.
- Invite all Expert Group Chairs or their representative to attend ACME. This would facilitate a meeting of the Committee Chair with a member of each of the Expert Groups.

It is believed that this situation is not unique to the Committee but is also shared by at least the Mariculture and Oceanography Committees.

It was agreed to change the operating procedure of the Committee meeting to accommodate more discussion of the direction of science in the Groups. The Expert Group reviews conducted at present will be dealt with by correspondence and only items requiring action by the Committee will be brought to the meeting. The discussion of the Expert Group Reports will focus on the scientific advances and challenges.

Election of Chairs

The Marine Habitat Committee accepted the nomination of David Connor (UK) as Chair of WGMHM, Robb Fryer (UK) as Chair of WGSAEM, and Heye Rumohr (Germany) as Chair of BEWG.

Close

The Chair expressed his gratitude to Committee members, and to Expert Group Chairs and their members.

