

## Marine Habitat Committee (E)

Chair: Paul Keizer (Canada)  
Rapporteur: Heye Rumohr (Germany)

The Marine Habitat Committee met on Tuesday 23 September from 09:00 to 13:00 hours, and on Friday 26 September from 16:00 to 18:00 hours. Thirteen participants from 9 ICES member countries were present on Tuesday and an additional 9 participants attended the Friday session. They included 12 members of the Marine Habitat Committee and four Chairs of Expert Groups reporting to the Marine Habitat Committee.

### Opening

The Chair welcomed the participants. He noted that at the beginning of the session on Friday a new chair for the Committee would be elected. The primary goal of the meeting was to discuss the work of and resolutions for the Expert Groups in relation to the Action Plan and amend draft Resolutions as required.

### Appointment of rapporteur

Heye Rumohr was appointed rapporteur.

### Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted with no changes.

### Committee membership and intersessional work

The Chair noted the continuing problems with attendance of the relevant Expert Group Chairs and the difficulty in having any intersessional work conducted by the Committee. The Chair has brought these matters to the attention of the Consultative Committee and will be tabling a proposal to that committee to mitigate the difficulty with Expert Group Chair assistance. The Chair also pointed out that part of the solution lies within the Committee and the Expert Groups themselves. The Committee concurred that the ASC should be a more attractive venue for scientists involved in the groups reporting it. This can be largely achieved by promoting more theme sessions of relevance.

### Proposed changes in the advisory process

The Delegates will be considering a proposal from the Study Group on ACFM, ACE, ACME and Working Group Protocols (SGAWWP) for changes in the advisory structure. The key features of the proposal are the creation of review groups for information flowing from the Expert Groups to the Advisory Committees and the creation of Integrating Assessment Groups. The proposed changes are mostly directed at stock assessment issues but are being proposed for all advisory activities. The Committee felt that the function of the proposed review groups, and their ability to conduct their work within the

existing timeframe, needs to be carefully considered. Peer review of the science for the Committee's issues is considered to be the role of the Expert Groups, and ACME and ACE provide additional peer review of issues that are used for advice. In addition to this secondary peer review, ACME and ACE are responsible for converting the scientific conclusions of the Expert Groups into information that is clear and useful to managers.

There was also concern expressed about the integrating assessment groups which would consider longer-term ecological or fisheries issues based on ecosystem areas. Some ICES member countries, e.g. Norway, already do integrated regional assessments. The EU is also developing regional assessment groups. These parallel developments pose a threat of duplication of effort and generally will call upon the same experts, resulting in an unsustainable workload. It was also noted that if ICES focuses its work on science in support of regional assessments, ICES will become less attractive to participants from the western North Atlantic and other regions.

The approach adopted for providing integrated assessments needs to be carefully considered so that it does not impact upon the ability of ICES to respond to specific issues and the participation in ICES by a broad range of marine science experts.

It was noted that the proposal also includes a mechanism for the provision of advice on a time scale that was shorter than the annual time scale presently applied to ICES advice. While this mechanism was largely in response to fisheries issues it will likely see application to broader environmental issues as well.

### The ICES Action Plan

The Action Plan for the Science and Advisory Committees was accepted by the Delegates at the 2002 Statutory Meeting. The Consultative Committee has begun an audit of the Action Plan to document our progress for the Delegates. A draft of this audit for this Committee was provided to members prior to the meeting for their comment. It was noted that no comments were received but that this was not unexpected, given the somewhat subjective nature of the task. No objections were made to the Chair completing the audit for activities in 2002 and 2003 and also identifying linkages to the Action Plan for the draft Resolutions for 2004.

It was noted that the main thrust of the Action Plan for the Committee was a shift to activities that would support an ecosystem-based approach to providing advice on environmental issues and the integration of knowledge

and advice on all human activities within an area. The past and future activities of each of the Expert Groups reporting to the Committee were then discussed to determine what changes, if any, were necessary to their terms of reference.

## Review of Expert Groups

### Study Group on the North Sea Benthos Project (SGNSBP)

The work of this Study Group is proceeding well. It is expected that a major gap in the database for the northern North Sea could be closed with data from the UK (Scotland). The database that is being constructed by this Group and the assessment and data products they will generate are critical components of the OSPAR sponsored habitat mapping pilot project for the North Sea. It was noted that the duration of Study Groups is normally a maximum of three years. In that regard the Study Group is being asked to provide some indication of the timeline for the various products it expects to produce. One of its major products will be input to the North Sea habitat mapping pilot project.

### Benthos Ecology Working Group (BEWG)

The past work and draft Terms of Reference for this Group are consistent with the long-term goal of ICES and expectation of clients to provide ecosystem-based advice in support of integrated management. The Working Group is being proactive in communicating the results of its work through the *ICES TIMES* series.

This Group routinely discusses ongoing cooperative studies. Amongst the items discussed at the 2003 meeting was a discussion of the impact on benthic habitats of the Prestige oil spill off Northern Spain (Figure E1). The Group noted that the real disaster was the lack of correct decisions – the oil should have been contained in the first place; the breaking up of the ship was caused by another wrong decision. BEWG considers that there is an urgent need for an international framework to reach early decisions in situations like this.

The Working Group had encountered some difficulty in addressing the request from OSPAR regarding sensitive and opportunistic species. In order to address those problems a Study Group on Ecological Quality Objectives for Sensitive and for Opportunistic Benthos Species (SGSOBS), parented by ACE, is being proposed for 2004. BEWG will formulate its advice on this request from OSPAR with assistance from the results of the Study Group.

A Study Group to Review Ecological Quality Objectives for Eutrophication (SGEUT), also parented by ACE, has been formed to address an OSPAR request to provide advice on the integration of the five EcoQOs related to eutrophication. This new Study Group will require assistance from BEWG, particularly with respect to the potential role of phytobenthos as an indicator.

This Working Group needs to maintain a close collaboration with SGQAE on issues related to Quality Assurance of biological data.

### Marine Chemistry Working Group (MCWG)

The reports of this Group are used extensively by ACME. The Working Group was unable to address the request to provide advice on the development of data products to illustrate eutrophication status because no chemical oceanographers attended the meeting and therefore that subgroup did not meet. This appears to be a chronic problem that reflects the general decline in marine science of the priority of chemical oceanographic research. The Chair of the Working Group will have to make an extra effort to attract the necessary expertise to its 2004 meeting since there are additional Terms of Reference for that subgroup. This includes a request to support the work of SGEUT.

### Working Group on the Statistical Aspects of Environmental Monitoring (WGSAM)

While this is a relatively small Working Group (15 members) its work is pivotal to much of the advice provided by ACME. Participation in the group is limited by the availability of environmental statisticians. Optimising the work of this Working Group through collaborations with other Expert Groups should be given a high priority. A term of reference has been added to the work of this Working Group and to a number of other Expert Groups to develop a multi-year plan for addressing statistical needs for environmental monitoring and assessment. The Expert Groups should consider

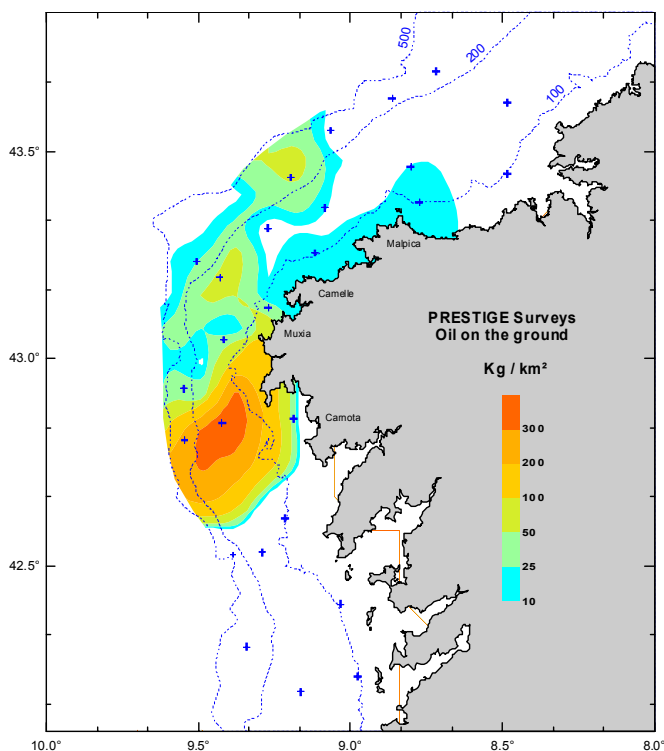


Figure E1. Distribution of oil from the “Prestige” oil tanker, on the bottom of the Galician Shelf (From 2003 BEWG report, CM2003/E09).

collaboration through a variety of methods including attendance of some members at WGSAAEM meetings, parallel meetings with WGSAAEM, and a workshop or workshops on practical applications. Such collaborations will not only be useful to the various Expert Groups but will also be useful to WGSAAEM through the provision of appropriate datasets for their work. The Working Group should, in collaboration with other Expert Groups develop a multi-year plan for addressing statistical needs for environmental monitoring and assessment.

A theme session is being proposed for 2005 that will highlight practical applications of environmental statistics. The WG is also being asked to consider the feasibility of preparing a communication product on environmental statistics that would provide practical examples of statistical applications. At present the valuable products of this WG can only be found in their annual reports and in the ACME reports. A compilation of this information with practical examples would be of great value to environmental scientists. It was noted that WGPDMO is preparing a manuscript for publication in the *ICES TIMES* series on proper statistical treatment of fish disease data.

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

The Working Group is making good progress in many areas and they are directing their efforts to biological effects aspects, which is a priority for ICES and its clients. The Working Group needs to finalise its annex to the sediment monitoring guidelines. These types of revisions tend to create problems for many Expert Groups since they do not set a firm date for completing the revisions. As a result they keep considering new material and the revision is never completed. In situations like this an appropriate revision period should be established and adhered to. The revision period would depend upon on the rate of change in the information available.

#### **Working Group on Marine Habitat Mapping (WGMHM)**

Work has evolved from the consideration of habitat classification schemes to the generation of pilot mapping projects. The North Sea pilot project will be of interest to many ICES Expert Groups and will provide the future basis for the integrated assessments of this area. Concern was expressed about the potential misuse of information from such projects if uncertainty in the information is not clearly communicated to the users. The Working Group has identified this issue in the past. A term of reference was modified to request the Working Group to explicitly address this issue at their next meeting.

The request concerning a habitat classification scheme for the Baltic Sea will be given to the new Study Group on Ecosystem Health Issues in the BSRP (SGEH). The progress on this request from HELCOM had been limited by the absence of any participation by the Baltic

countries. The Group will work closely with SGEH to develop the scheme and subsequent maps for the Baltic.

#### **Working Group on the Effects of Extraction of Marine Sediments on the Marine Ecosystem (WGEXT)**

There have been some very positive changes in the work of this group over the past 3 years. The Group has developed and implemented an electronic reporting format that has significantly reduced the time the Group requires to deal with the national reports. This approach has been positively noted by OSPAR and they have requested that the Group prepare reports for the entire OSPAR region. It was noted that there has been some difficulty in obtaining reports or reports of no activity from some countries. This problem has been brought to the attention of OSPAR.

A *Cooperative Research Report* that is under preparation will focus on risk and impact assessment and development of an ecosystem approach to managing aggregate extraction. This report should be of great interest to ICES and its clients.

#### **Study Group on Quality Assurance of Biological Measurements in the Northeast Atlantic (SGQAE)**

The activities of this Study Group under the parentage of ACME had been funded by OSPAR, but that funding was not available in 2003. However, as it was considered important to continue the work so its parentage was transferred to the Marine Habitat Committee who was responsible for the 2003 activities of the Group. As this Study Group is again being funded by OSPAR, ACME will parent the Group once again.

#### **Working Group on the Biological Effects of Contaminants (WGBEC)**

The recent and on-going developments in biotechnology, particularly with respect to genomics and proteomics is not explicit in the Terms of Reference for this Group. However, the Group has been discussing developments in biotechnology and potential applications to biological effects research and monitoring on a regular basis. At present the use of these technologies has not been developed to the point where they are operational. An additional item was added to the Group's Terms of Reference for 2004 to include an explicit report on their discussion and evaluation of the potential usefulness of these techniques. This Working Group has a very large workload proposed for 2004 (17 terms of reference) and it may not be possible for all items to be addressed.

#### **Study Group on Information Needs for Coastal Zone Management (SGINC)**

There was no change in the Terms of Reference for this Group that will have its second and final meeting in 2004 after which it will submit its final report.

## **General comments on the Expert Groups**

The Chair noted that the Chairs of the Expert Groups should be made aware that the audience for their reports includes the Advisory Committees who use relevant sections of their reports as the foundation for the advice provided to the clients of ICES. As such the work of the Expert Groups is most useful if it is presented concisely using a scientific style. While generally the quality of the reports is good the Chair undertook to bring this guidance to the attention of the Expert Group Chairs.

## **Proposals for new study groups**

A proposal was received for a new study group on produced water. It was agreed that the potential biological effects of produced water discharges from offshore oil and gas production was an important issue both in the North Sea and on the Atlantic coast of Canada. The issue was addressed to some degree by the BECPELAG project which looked at biological effects in the North Sea along a transect extending “downstream” from an oil production platform. The results of this work will be published in 2004. However, there are likely additional issues that need to be addressed. It was decided that the best way to deal with this issue in a timely manner was to ask WGBEC to review the scientific information on biological effects of produced water and make recommendations on how to proceed.

## **Proposals for theme sessions for 2005**

The following proposals for theme sessions were supported by the Committee:

- Quality assurance of marine biological studies.
- Oil spills in marine ecosystems: impacts and remediation.
- How to improve environmental monitoring and biological studies – integrating ecology and statistics.
- Spatial dimensions of the ecosystem structure and dynamics (in collaboration with the Resource Management Committee).

It was agreed that these proposals addressed high priority issues that would be of interest to the marine environmental science community and therefore would hopefully attract “young” marine environmental scientists to the 2005 ASC.

## **Proposals for symposia**

A proposal was presented to hold a symposium on “Marine Bioinvasions”. It is anticipated that this symposium will receive financial support from NOAA Sea Grant and would be held on the east coast of the USA in the spring of 2006. There was strong support for the proposal.

A proposal was also received to hold a symposium, possibly in 2007, on “The Role and Effectiveness of

Marine Environmental Indicators in Meeting Regulatory Needs: Lessons Learnt”. This proposal is in a preliminary stage anticipating the need to undertake an extensive assessment of the initial implementation of EcoQOs. It will be presented to the Consultative Committee, but it is likely that it will require further development before a decision would be made on ICES sponsorship\*. OSPAR would be approached to co-sponsor the symposium.

## **Science Committee meetings in 2005**

In 2005 the scientific and Delegates meetings of ICES will be separated in time and space. This presents opportunities to make changes in the arrangements for the Science Committee meetings. Committee members expressed a desire to have a longer period for meeting, preferably a full day at the beginning of the ASC, and then a 2- to 3-hour period at the end of the ASC to finalise resolutions for the Consultative meetings. At present discussions are mostly limited to science management issues with little opportunity to discuss the science.

## **Election of the Chair of Marine Habitat Committee**

Heye Rumohr (Germany) was elected Chair of the Marine Habitat Committee for the period 2004 to 2006.

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\* This Symposium was endorsed by the Delegates (Resolution C. Res. 2003/2ESY01), but with the title “Marine Environmental Indicators: Utility in Meeting Regulatory Needs.”

