

Open session

Methodological advances to evaluate ecosystem impacts of human activities

Conveners: Henn Ojaveer (HAPISG) and Silvana Birchenough (EPDSG)

The Open session took part on the first day of the Annual Science Conference with a duration of 1.5 hours. This was the only session during the time-slot and the meeting room was full of participants.

There were four presentations at the session, followed by general discussion. The presentations were by Vanessa Stelzenmüller entitled: *“New applications for advancing our understanding of cumulative effects assessment approaches”*, by Jan Geert Hiddink on *“Assessment of bottom trawling pressure and impact on benthic habitats in the east Atlantic”*, by Sven Sebastian Uhlmann on *“Shaping European policy: why and how discard research underpins high survival exemptions from the discard ban”*, and by Gerjan Piet on *“Identifying thresholds for benthic impact through co-creation with stakeholders”*.

The presentations were followed by discussions, during which the following issues were highlighted:

Unit of pressure needs clarification, particularly when included in cumulative effects assessments;

There is a need to improve standards in the way that activities and pressure data are handled;

Data transformation has an important influence on the results of mapping exercises, but equally has its limitations and could be used inappropriately;

An ecological basis is needed for defining thresholds. There is lot of knowledge available that could be used for this;

Differences in the understanding of terminology used could be an issue, therefore there is a need for standardised terminology;

There is a need to identify critical variables and ensure their use is fit for purpose;

Several research groups are working on cumulative effects assessments, so there is no wrong or right approach, but it is good for these groups to share examples and ‘best practice’ of approaches;

The need for bringing different fields of expertise together to look at the different methods within a region is welcomed. Applying consistent methods across different situations is important and should be considered;

Analyses require a toolbox of models rather than selecting only one and trying to force all data into this one approach.

The discussions after the Open Session (including during the Poster Session) indicated that there was growing interest in the ICES community to further deal with and to engage in cumulative effects related research and activities. The chairs of EPDSG, HAPISG and IEASG discussed the issue and suggested that small group of people could be formed to investigate the feasibility and possibility to advance this subject field in ICES. Vanessa Stelzenmüller and Gerjan Piet tentatively agreed to lead a new expert group.