



MARITIME FORUM

Study 2006-15 lot 7: Joint data collection between the fishing sector and the scientific community in the North Sea

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Making systematic use of information generated by the fishing industry in the production of scientific advice can be a cost effective way to improve the quality of data while strengthening cooperation between scientists and fishermen.

Why this study?

Good management of fisheries requires sound scientific advice, which again requires a platform of good quality data on the fish stocks and fisheries. In recent years the quality of this data for many European stocks has been questioned from both within the scientific community as well as from the fishing industry. Most of the data currently used is collected through monitoring programmes such as biological surveys, sampling and EU logbooks, but there is also much information generated by the industry itself although not necessarily systematically or in a way that makes it directly usable for the production of scientific advice.

This study aims to bring scientists and industry together in improving the quality of the data available for advice, through exploring systematic scientific use of industry generated data and joint data collection programmes - while at the same time extending the current efforts to build an atmosphere of collaboration between scientists and fishermen.

Goals

1. Improve the quality of the data available for scientific advice on North Sea stocks and fisheries
2. Contribute to a general atmosphere of cooperation between European scientists and the fishing industry

Results

The programme has successfully facilitated collaboration between representatives from fishers' organisations and scientific fisheries institutes in the resolution of fisheries issues of importance to the North Sea Regional Advisory Council (NSRAC).

A series of studies which covered the themes of the Lot 7 Studies and Pilot projects for carrying out the common fisheries policy Terms of Reference were outlined by the project team, discussed and agreed with the NSRAC Executive Committee and its Demersal Working Group. Meetings were then organised within the project framework and at NSRAC meetings to refine the studies and carry out and present and discuss the analyses. The group has:

- Reviewed the published information, listed studies that can be used as examples and provided suggestions for self sampling data gathering programmes that can be applied by fishers.
- Reviewed the information that can be gathered from collaborative surveys currently taking place in the North Sea. Data collected from a series of coordinated commercial surveys, designed by fishers, can provide the information required to improve stock assessments, especially at the oldest ages where catch rates in surveys are low. The basis for such a coordinated survey is already in place because several countries are already conducting surveys that could, over time, and with minor modifications to sampling protocols and design be combined to provide an industry survey series. The expertise and experience is already available, but setting up of such a survey will require input from more countries to give greater coverage and could be encouraged by EU funding of industry projects. The study group has helped to begin this process already, by collaborating to provide input into the design of a new North Sea wide gadoid survey that has been funded and incorporated within the UK Fisheries Science Partnership programme; the first fishing survey was conducted in 2009. The survey results can be used to link together indices from surveys conducted in other areas in a combined analysis.
- Analysed catch rates from commercial surveys being conducted currently in the North Sea to address fishers concerns about the quality of research survey catch rates. Two studies have demonstrated that indices derived from soft and hard substrate have similar dynamics and that there is coherence between commercial data and research surveys at young ages. However, the studies both raised concerns about low catch rates at older ages in research surveys resulting in noise in stock assessments. Information from the collaborative surveys described previously would resolve this.
- Within studies examining the utility of VMS data the study group reviewed the methods applied by analysts from each member state to process satellite monitoring data and extract fishing information. The team compiled a common protocol for the standardisation of approaches for use in common projects, the first time this has been carried out. The analysis methods were applied to VMS data on fishers' spatial movements and gear use within an area of the North Sea that may be designated as a potential Natura 2000 conservation area by the UK. A report was prepared at the request of the North Sea RAC and presented to its Demersal Working Group, providing them with information on usage of the area by gear country and also the species catches by weight and value. The NSRAC highlighted the value of the information provided by the group to its future advice and discussions with managers as to the use of the area of seabed. Study results were presented to and have been used by: the NSRAC Executive Committee and the NSRAC Demersal Working Group at its tri-annual meetings; directly to the industry to highlight the information contained within data and to provide guidance on alternative sources and ways in which it can

be collected; the ICES North Sea Working Group.

The CoDFINS project is considered to have been a challenging and important project with lessons learned in two main areas. Firstly the targeting of data collection and analysis at areas of research that are current to the NSRAC in a rapidly changing biological system and political environment. Second the process of working within the temporal framework of the NSRAC which has only a few meetings each year at which work plans can be proposed, revised and results discussed.

Project development followed the protocol designed into the work plan at the start of the project with successful completion of the design and implementation phase. However, significant delays in the progress of the scheduled work have been a feature from the start, resulting from three main factors:

- Assembling the participants together at an initial meeting and scheduling the work for the subsequent analysis proved problematic. The well documented, recent problems in the fisheries of the North Sea compounded with the changes to the timing of the ICES advice schedule from October to June, following a request from the Commission, resulted in the participants (scientific and industry) having to commit to a substantial unforeseen workload at short notice to the time of the year at which the project was initially due to occur, following discussions with the Commission, the project start date was therefore rescheduled.
- A second factor which has complicated progress for two of the projects has been logistical stresses resulting from the unscheduled retirement and resignation of key project members from their institute. The team members were essential to one, and key to a second of the projects which were agreed with the NSRAC. The problems associated with each project are described later within the individual project descriptions. The first project could not be completed without the key analyst and the time allocated to it was diverted to a new task that met the Lot 7 Terms of Reference. Following a further delay, the second project was reassigned and shared between two alternative project managers who successfully completed the work.
- The third aspect which has delayed the work of the project team but not altered the characteristics of the projects was the logistic difficulties in dealing with the NSRAC which meets infrequently during the year and has a numerous issues to cover at its meetings. The scheduling of the NSRAC meetings has a formal structure which needed to be considered in the timing of discussions and the presentation of results and this had not been factored into the original timing of the project.

The logistical difficulties have resulted in important lessons being learned by the Project Team whom consider that the project has been successful in achieving its aim of facilitating collaboration between representatives from fishers' organisations and scientific fisheries institutes in the resolution of fisheries issues of importance to the North Sea Regional Advisory Council (NSRAC), albeit at a slower pace than originally envisaged possible.

Reference

Full title: Cooperation to Develop Fisheries Information from the North Sea

Organisations:

Danish Institute for Fisheries Research (DIFRES), Denmark

Fisheries Research Services, (FRS), Scotland

Institut français de recherche pour l'exploitation de la mer (IFREMER) France

Institute for Marine Resources and Ecosystem Studies (IMARES), Netherlands

Comite National des Peches (France)

Danmarks Fiskeriforening (Denmark)

National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations (NFFO) (England & Wales)

Productschap Vis (Netherlands)

Scottish White Fish Producers Association (SWFPA) (Scotland)

Full report:

http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/documentation/studies/cooperation-to-develop-fisheries-info-from-north-sea_en.pdf [1]

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