

Resource Management Committee

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**REPORT OF THE
INTERNATIONAL BOTTOM TRAWL SURVEY WORKING
GROUP**

By Correspondence

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Section	Page
1 TERMS OF REFERENCE.....	1
2 GENERAL.....	1
3 SESITS IN THE SOUTHERN AREAS.....	1
4 COOPERATION IN THE WESTERN AREAS.....	2
5 ICES SURVEY DATA VALIDATION/VERIFICATION PROGRAM.....	2
6 INPUT OF HISTORICAL IBTS DATA.....	2
7 MEETING IN 1999.....	3

1 TERMS OF REFERENCE

During the Annual Science Conference of ICES in Baltimore in 1997 the following resolution (2:31) was adopted:

The International Bottom Trawl Survey Working Group [IBTSWG] (Chairman: Dr H. Heessen, Netherlands) will work by correspondence in 1998 to:

- a) propose further coordination of quarter 4 bottom trawl surveys in Sub-areas VI, VII and VIII and Division IXa;
- b) consider the standardisation of these surveys;
- c) propose a depth and area/latitude stratified station grid;
- d) describe specific modifications of the IBTS exchange format, to include data from western and southern surveys;
- e) modify the Manual for the IBTS to include specifications for the western and southern surveys;
- f) evaluate the progress made in establishing a common database as specified at the last meeting of IBTSWG;
- g) review the ICES survey data validation/verification program and plan for its use in relation to future and earlier surveys;
- h) plan for a meeting in 1999. IBTSWG will report to the Resource Management and Living Resources Committees at the 1998 Annual Science Conference and to ACFM before its October 1998 meeting.

2 GENERAL

The most important developments concerning the IBTS, since the last formal meeting of the WG in Santander in March 1997 (ICES 1997), have been in the surveys in the "western and southern areas" (Sub Area VI, VII, VIII and Division IXa). Progress in the standardisation in the southern surveys was mainly the result of an EU funded project (SESITS) in which Portugal, Spain and France cooperate. In the western surveys, coordination between France, Ireland and Scotland improved greatly since the Santander meeting.

As a result of a decision taken by the delegates at the Baltimore ASC concerning the maximum term of working group chairs, a new chairperson is needed for the IBTS Working Group. This matter has not yet (August 1998) been resolved.

From 13 to 18 August a Study Group will evaluate the quarterly IBTS Surveys held in the North Sea, Skagerrak and Kattegat from 1991 to 1995. The result of this evaluation may be important for the continuation of the surveys in this area.

A new meeting of the IBTS Working Group should be planned for early 1999.

3 SESITS IN THE SOUTHERN AREAS

The main aim of the EU funded project SESITS (Evaluation of demersal resources of south-western Europe from standardised groundfish surveys) is to standardise the demersal surveys carried out in ICES areas VIIIa,b,c and IXa.

Up till now, France, Spain and Portugal each use a different standard gear in their routine surveys in this area. SESITS considers the introduction of the GOV trawl as the standard gear. Comparisons between Baka trawl (Spain) and the GOV (France), and between Campelen trawl (Portugal) and GOV are part of the project. There are two main complications with regard to the possible introduction of the GOV in the whole area. One concerns the rigging of the GOV, and one its efficiency. In this area France does not rig the GOV-trawl in the standard way according to the IBTS Manual, since no kite is being used (ICES 1997). Another complication is that the standard GOV-trawl performs

poorly, especially compared to the Campelen trawl, in catching flatfish, whereas for Portugal flatfish is an important component of the demersal catch of these surveys.

Another element in SESITS is the introduction of overlap in survey areas of the three countries involved, but this has not yet been introduced on a routine basis.

4 COOPERATION IN THE WESTERN AREAS

In the northern part of the western area, four quarter 4 surveys were carried out by France (EVHOE), UK (SMR) and Ireland (WCGS and ISCSGS) in 1997. Following the 1997 IBTS WG meeting, contacts were established between each of the laboratories involved in these surveys. Contacts were maintained during the 1997 quarter 4 surveys, and the gear used, survey protocols, survey coverage and the establishing of some preliminary overlapping tows were discussed. This was a major achievement for the first year of co-ordination between these surveys. Furthermore, the co-ordinator (P. Connolly, Ireland) received the details of all available UK (Scottish) and French tow positions for the northern part of the western area and has compiled a list of available safe tows.

Ireland commissioned a new 32 m research vessel in July 1997. The vessel was fitted out with new GOV trawls in line with IBTS guidelines. A reservoir of safe tows were compiled based on tow positions sourced from UK and French surveys and from Irish commercial fishermen. These tows were used to establish the survey grid for the new Irish Sea Celtic Sea Groundfish survey (ISCSGS) which was carried out by Ireland in October 1997. The survey fishes 77 stations over a three week period in Division VIIa and VIIg. Contacts were established with the Scottish Mackerel Recruit Survey (SMR) and this survey trawled some of the tows fished by the ISCSGS in the northern Irish Sea. The data from the comparative tows will be examined and discussed with the UK survey co-ordinators, by correspondence, before the next quarter 4 surveys in 1998.

The WCGS (Part A in VIa and VIIb; and Part B in VIIb and VIIj) was carried out by Ireland in October/November 1997. A total of 87 stations were fished. The survey coverage for the WCGS Part A was extended to include a number of overlapping stations with the UK (Scottish) SMR. The survey coverage for the WCGS Part B was extended further south to overlap with the French (EVHOE) survey, which was also extended further north. The comparative tows from these surveys will be examined and discussed with the UK and French survey co-ordinators, by correspondence, before the next quarter 4 survey in 1998. Data from the WCGS (Part A) were presented to the ICES Northern Shelf Working Group for the first time, and contributed to the assessments of VIa cod, whiting and haddock.

In 1998, WCGS, SMR, EVHOE and ISCSGS surveys are due to be carried out in quarter 4. Contacts will continue between the various laboratories to further consider standardisation of the surveys, examine the survey grids and ensure that further overlapping tows are carried out. Irish observers will join the SMR survey in order to discuss survey protocols. Furthermore, Ireland, France and the UK (Scotland) are in the process of submitting a proposal to DGXIV in order to secure funding to further standardise the surveys, carry out comparative tows, and conduct a detailed analysis of the survey results. The absence of an IBTS WG meeting in 1998 means that there is no forum for detailed discussions on further co-ordination and standardisation of the northern surveys in the western area and progress will rely on work carried out on an ad-hoc basis by correspondence.

5 ICES SURVEY DATA VALIDATION/VERIFICATION PROGRAM

Only some minor improvements have been made to the ICES survey data validation/verification program since it was presented and tested during the IBTS WG meeting in March 1997 (ICES, 1997).

6 INPUT OF HISTORICAL IBTS DATA

The input of historical IBTS data was completed in the course of 1998 as part of an EU funded project. The data are now being checked by the ICES Secretariat and will be loaded in the ICES IBTS Database shortly. Later this year, data for all IYFS and IBTS surveys carried out since 1965 will be available from the Database.

The coordination and standardisation of the surveys in the western and southern areas formed the main subject of the last meeting of the IBTS WG. In order to continue the ongoing process of coordination and standardisation of these surveys, the same subject should be dealt with in the next WG meeting. No significant progress has been made concerning some of the terms of reference of the current year, and these terms should therefore be maintained. The main terms of reference for the 1999 meeting of the WG should be to:

- a) consider further coordination and standardisation of quarter 4 bottom trawl surveys in Sub-areas VI, VII and VIII and Division IXa;
- b) propose a depth and area/latitude stratified station grid;
- c) describe specific modifications of the IBTS exchange format, to include data from western and southern surveys;
- d) modify the Manual for the IBTS to include specifications for the western and southern surveys;
- e) evaluate the progress made in establishing a common database as specified at the last meeting of IBTSWG;
- f) consider the implications of the results of the Study Group on the Evaluation of the quarterly IBTS surveys for the North Sea area;
- g) consider the standard index calculations and the implication of changes in assessment units for the species-specific standard areas used.

Motivation:

The IBTS WG coordinates surveys in the North Sea, Skagerrak and Kattegat (in recent years carried out in quarters 1 and 3) and surveys in quarter 4 in the western and southern areas (Sub-areas VI, VII and VIII and Division IXa). The surveys are in different stages of coordination and standardisation. The remit of the IBTS WG is rather complex. Approximately 5 days will be needed to cover all subjects. In order to stimulate the input from the southern countries it is proposed to have the meeting in Portugal.