

Proposal for a future North Sea sandeel management

Prepared August 2010 by the Danish Fishermen's Association

Introduction

This paper outlines a proposal for the future management of the sandeel fishery. It has been developed through an intensive series of meetings in August 2010 between a small working group within the Danish Fishermen's Association (DFA) and all the key stakeholders in relation to the Danish sandeel fishery. The proposal thus originates in the DFA, but through the intensive process it has been possible to adapt the proposal to incorporate or align with the views, knowledge and outlooks of the other stakeholders to a surprisingly high degree.

The proposal was conceived in a wish to get beyond the year-to-year instability, seasonal uncertainty and last-minute decisions we have experienced in the North Sea sandeel management for several years. The problems can be briefly summarised as:

- The biological difficulties of finding the exact combination of the right monitoring period for the real-time management, and a pre-defined formula which automatically ensures the correct quota based on the monitoring.
- The operational and financing problems for the participating vessels that can never plan for the fishing season, because the quota is only known half-way through.
- The large and tightly compressed work-load the current real-time management places upon the advisory bodies as well as the Commission and Member State administrations.

It is probably safe to say that these problems all came to a peak in 2010, and that all stakeholders the working group have met with – fishermen, processors, scientists and the Commission as well as Member State managers – in each their way felt the burden of a management system that just does not work.

The proposal

1. Separate the advice, management and quotas for North Sea sandeel in two separately managed areas, the EU-zone and the Norwegian zone – through mutual agreement between Norway and the EU.
2. Attach the management of the sandeel in the Skagerrak (EU-part) to the EU-zone in the North Sea, either as part of sub-zone 3 or sub-zone 2 (see attached map)
3. Yearly procedure for setting the TAC for in the EU area

Advice:

- a. September previous year: Stock assessment incorporating data from the previous years fishery gives an estimate of the stock of two year and older fish in TAC-year.
- b. December previous year: Update assessment incorporating data from dredge surveys gives an estimate of one year old fish in the TAC-year.
- c. a. and b. are combined to give advice for a TAC (in simple terms a. plus b. minus Bpa).

Management:

- d. If the advice is that a TAC of 500.000 t or more would be sustainable, the TAC is set at 500.000 t for the entire season.

- e. If the advice is that a TAC between 400.000 t and 500.000 t would be sustainable, the TAC is set at this level for the entire season.
- f. If the advice shows that neither e. nor f. can be followed, the TAC is set at 400.000 t *and* a real-time monitoring of the fishery is set in place.
 - i. Based upon the real-time monitoring, the Commission is advised upon the need for in-season restrictions – “safe-guards”. Possible safe-guards include:
 1. Closing predefined sub-zones of the North Sea (see attached map) for the remaining season, when a certain part of the quota has been taken there (e.g. the total North Sea quota remains 400.000 t, but *no more than* 50.000 t may be taken in area X).
 2. Closing predefined sub-zones at a certain time during the season.
 3. Closing the entire fishery at a certain time during the season.

Effects

The proposal would create four inter-linked changes to the current system:

1. Currently the each season starts with a low TAC, and then monitors the fishery in real-time to be able to raise the TAC to the sustainable level. This is reversed to a higher TAC and if necessary real-time monitoring as a basis for introducing safe-guards. Because of basic EU regulations introducing safe-guards during the season is much faster and less bureaucratically cumbersome than raising the TAC.
2. This reversal also means that the legal necessity for a pre-defined exact formula for turning monitoring into TAC during the season is no longer there. In stead the safe-guards can be introduced on the basis of real biological advice, which is able to take account of the multitude of factors that influence the sustainability of the fishery, in a way that no formula can do.
3. As real-time monitoring is only used in those years when the stock assessment and dredge survey do not give sufficient certainty that the stock can sustain a fishery of 400.000 t or more, much of the large amounts of resources currently spent upon real-time monitoring can be saved – and better spent on e.g. expanding the coverage of the dredge surveys.
4. As the TAC is set before the start of the fishing season, each vessel will be able to plan its fishing according to the available quota. In those years where there is real-time monitoring showing the need for safe-guards, this will coincide with low catch-rates and thus a fishery which may already be unprofitable before the restrictions set in.

Regulations outside the proposal

- No fishing from August 1 to March 31.
 - 95 % target species rule and probably the tightest level of MCS in any EU fishery.
 - A large area closed to fishing since 2000 (Wee Banke / Firth of Forth) to ensure sandeel availability for nesting sea-birds.
- In 2009 the main fishing ground for sandeel, the Dogger Bank, was closed mid-season (June 15) because fishermen were experiencing too large levels of 0 year old fish in the catches. It is envisaged that such a system of catch-triggered real-time closures should be implemented in parallel with the above proposal, in order to protect the recruitment for the coming years' fisheries.

Stakeholders consulted in the process

The working group – or parts of it – has held meetings with:

The European Commission

DTU Aqua – the Danish National Institute of Aquatic Resources

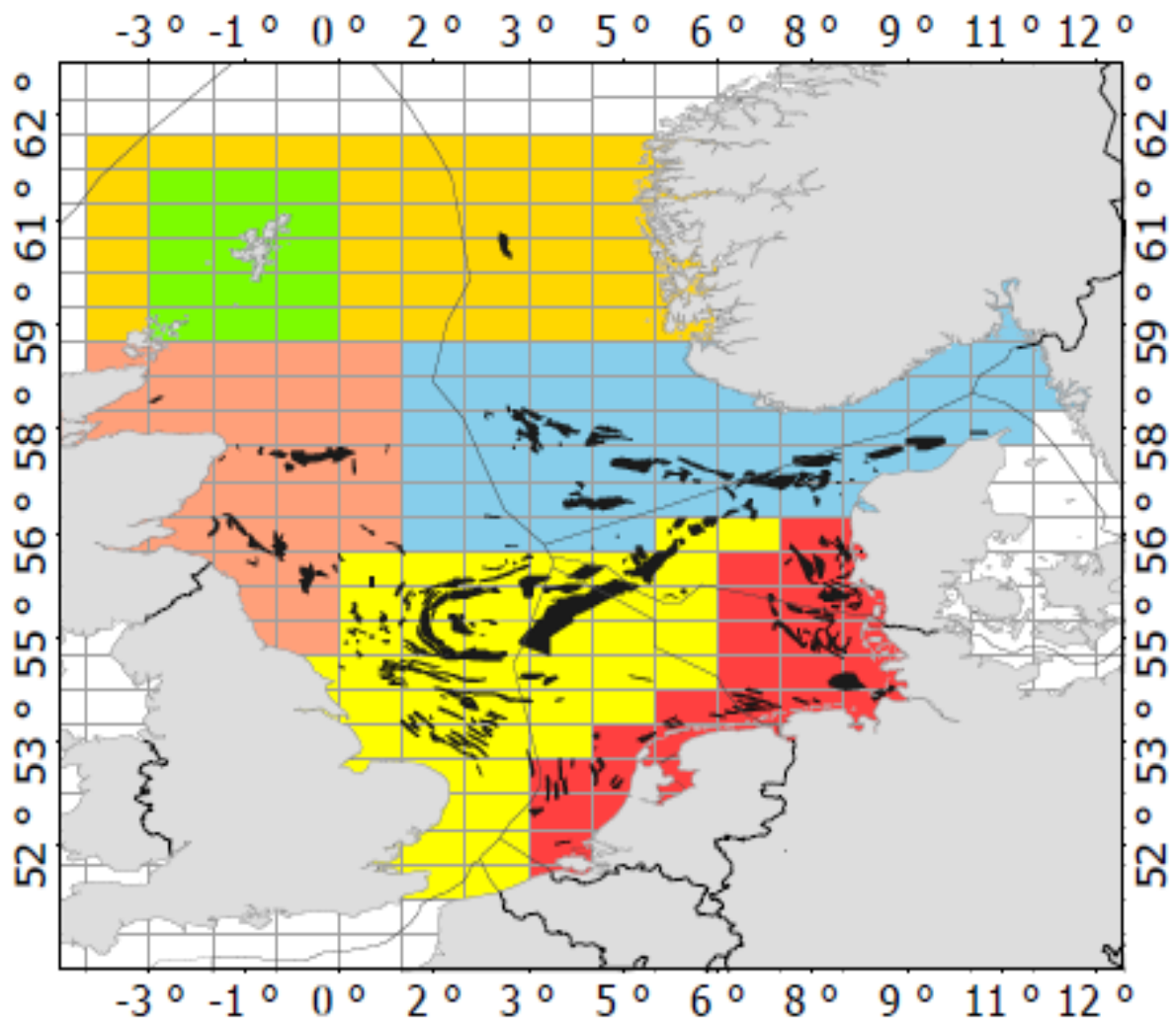
The Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries and the Directorate of Fisheries

The Danish Association of Fishmeal and Fishoil Processors

The DFA's Committee for Industrial and Pelagic Fisheries

The Danish Pelagic Producers' Organisation

Map of North Sea sandeel fishing grounds and 7 sub-zones based on divisions suggested by ICES in 2009.



- GUL = 1
- RØD = 2
- BLÅ = 3
- PINK = 4
- ORANGE = 5
- Kattegat = 6
- GRØN = 7