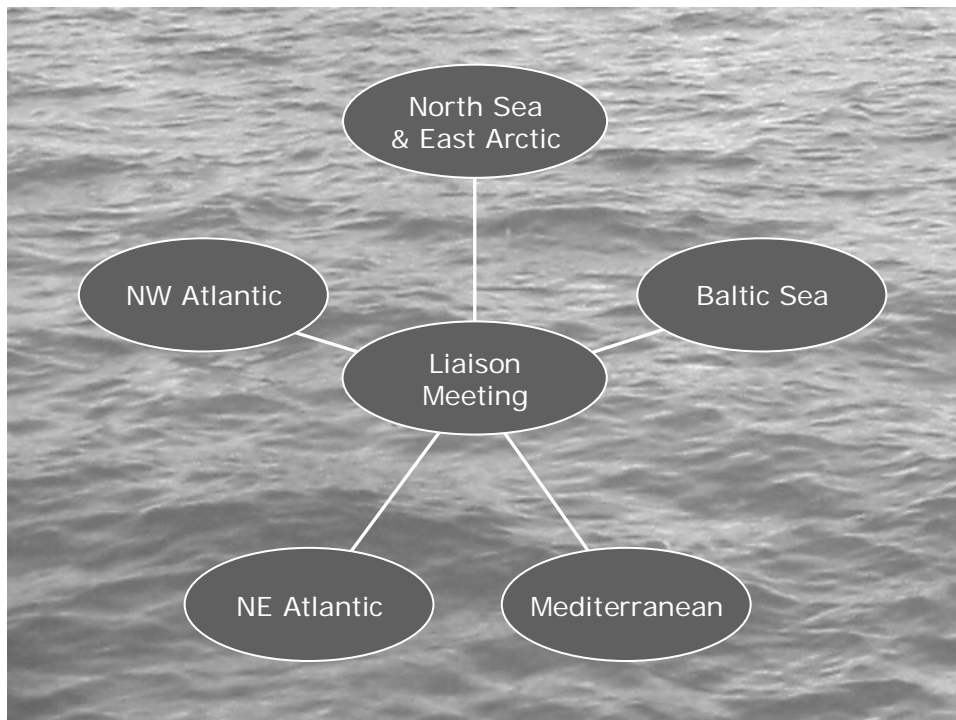


EU Data Collection Regulation  
Establishing a Community Framework for the Collection  
and Management of Data Needed to Conduct the CFP

## **Report of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Liaison Meeting between the Chairs of the RCMs, the Chair of SGRN and the European Commission**

Brussels, 6-7 February 2006



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Chair of RCM NAFO

Chair of RCM Medit

Chair of RCM NEA

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## 2. Role and tasks of the Liaison Meeting

### 2.1. Role and timing of Liaison Meetings

The Liaison Meeting (LM) has identified the following areas where it can contribute to the effectiveness of data collection and co-ordination within the framework of the Data Collection Regulation (DCR):

- Make sure that the Regional Co-ordination Meetings (RCMs) move into the same direction.
- Address recommendations made by the RCMs and comment on these / modify them when considered appropriate / necessary.
- Identify issues, developments etc. that are of a pan-European interest and propose actions to be undertaken at the appropriate level (Member States, RCMs, SGRN, DCR Revision expert groups, European Commission, ICES and its subsidiary expert groups, etc.).

To make sure that communication between RCMs, LM, SGRN and the Commission is most effective, the LM proposes the following timing for the relevant meetings from 2006 onwards:

- All RCMs to take place in late summer or autumn, i.e. after the submission of the National Programme (NP) proposals for the upcoming year but before the end of October. RCM reports to be finalised before the LM of mid-November.
- LM to take place mid-November. LM report to be finalised before the December meeting of SGRN.
- Discussion of the LM report at the December meeting of SGRN. Submission of SGRN's final conclusions and recommendations on RCM-related issues that impact the MSs' data collection programmes "in the field", to the STECF, the Commission and the MSs.

In doing so, the decision making process can be sped up considerably and MSs can be informed sufficiently well in time on the changes they can / should make to their NPs in response to the RCM recommendations, while at the same time, the role of the different advisory bodies on data collection issues (SGRN and STECF) is fully respected.

For the 2006 NPs, it is too late to follow the above procedure. As an intermediate solution, the LM proposes that MSs should be allowed to adjust their NPs for 2006 according to the suggestions made by the RCMs, in as much as these suggestions were endorsed by the LM (see relevant sections of this report for details).

### 2.2. RCM Reports discussed at 2006 Liaison Meeting

During its meeting in February 2006, the LM discussed the following RCM Reports:

- ***RCM Baltic Sea*** (RCM Baltic): Report of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Regional Co-ordination Meeting (RCM Baltic), Tallinn, Estonia, 17-21 October 2005.

- ***RCM North Sea & East Arctic***, formerly RCM North Sea (RCM NS&EA): Second Regional Co-ordination Meeting (RCM) for the North Sea area, Bergen, Norway, 26-30 September 2005.
- ***RCM North East Atlantic*** (RCM NEA): Regional Co-ordination Meeting North East Atlantic (RCM NEA), Gijon, Spain, 3-7 October 2005.
- ***RCM North West Atlantic*** (RCM NAFO): First Regional Co-ordination Meeting for the Atlantic North West (NAFO area), Vigo, Spain, 20-22 April 2005.
- ***RCM Mediterranean Sea*** (RCM Medit): Regional Co-ordination Meeting (RCM) for the Mediterranean Area, Athens, Greece, 16-17 June 2005.

### **2.3. Circulation of Liaison Meeting Reports**

The LM suggests that the reports of its meetings be sent to:

- The Commission.
- The Chair of STECF.
- The Chair (and the members) of SGRN.
- The Chairs (and the members) of the RCMs.
- The National Correspondents.
- The Chair of PGCCDBS.
- Any other parties addressed by the LM, either directly, or indirectly (through the recommendations made by the RCMs).

The LM also suggests that its reports be published on the Data Collection website hosted by JRC, together with the reports of the RCMs.

### 3. Strengthening the link with PGCCDBS

Since its establishment, the ICES Planning Group on Commercial Catch, Discards and Biological Sampling (PGCCDBS) has been involved in a number of DCR-related issues, such as the planning of ring-tests, inter-calibration exercises and dedicated workshops. Because of the time-consuming procedure within ICES to define the Terms of Reference of its subsidiary expert groups and to agree on their reports, the PGCCDBS is not the quickest way to respond to recommendations by the RCMs on short-term action to be taken by MSs to adjust their NPs. The LM welcomes the initiative taken by ICES to shortcut the standard procedures for setting up study groups, workshops, etc. Under this new "fast-track procedure", the Chair of the PGCCDBS will have the possibility – upon a recommendation by the PGCCDBS and with the agreement of the General Secretary of ICES and the Chair of the ICES MCAP – to issue short-notice calls for workshops and meetings, to deal with specific issues, e.g. on ageing or precision of collected data. Regardless of this initiative, the LM remains of the opinion that adjustments to the actual NPs for the year to come, can best be dealt with through the procedure described in Section 2.

Apart from the organisation of study groups and workshops, there is an important role to be played by the PGCCDBS in the DCR-machinery, amongst others by addressing data collection related issues of pan-European interest over the longer term. For this to be most effective, it is important that the links between the RCMs, the LM and the PGCCDBS are strengthened, and the LM proposes that this be done by inviting the Chair of PGCCDBS to the future LMs.

However, the LM also insists that strengthening the link with PGCCDBS – and with ICES in general – on data collection issues, should not be to the detriment of the links with areas that are outside the geographical competence of ICES (such as e.g. the Mediterranean, NAFO and CECAF).

#### 4. Spatial delimitation of areas of competence of the RCMs

After having considered the proposals made by the RCMs, the LM agreed on the following spatial delimitation of the areas of competence of the RCMs:

RCM Baltic	ICES Sub-area III, except IIIa
RCM NS&EA	ICES Sub-areas I, II, IIIa, IV and VIIId
RCM NEA	ICES Sub-areas V, VI, VII (except VIIId), VIII, IX, X, XII and XIV, plus CEFAC Area 34, plus widely distributed stocks that have their main geographical distribution in the aforementioned areas, but that also extend into ICES Sub-areas I, II, IIIa, IV and VIIId (e.g. hake, mackerel)
RCM NAFO	North West Atlantic, plus <i>Sebastes</i> in ICES Sub-areas V, XII and X
RCM Medit	Mediterranean Sea, FAO Sub-area 37

The LM highly values the involvement of non-EU countries such as Norway and Russia in the RCMs, and hopes that this will continue in the future.

## 5. Métier-based approach of the DCR

### 5.1. Discussion of RCM proposals

The LM considered the matrices proposed by the RCMs for the métier-based approach of biological and economic data collection under the new DCR, and notes that none of the métier definitions proposed by the RCMs are in conflict with the general principle of the data matrix, which defines métiers in terms of gear type (level 4), target assemblage (level 5) and mesh size (level 6), if appropriate, combined with any other devices that contribute to the selectivity of fishing gear, such as separator panels, grids, etc. Even the fleet segments proposed by RCM NAFO (see Section 9 in the 2005 Report of RCM NAFO), which, at first sight, depart from the general principle of the data matrix, can perfectly be fitted into the matrix.

The LM notes that the requirement to match level 6 in the matrix (mesh size) with the mesh size regulations in force, implies that the métier definitions will change every time the mesh size regulations change. The consequence being that, over time, métiers may cease to exist and be replaced by others, and hence, that there may be discontinuity in the biological and economic time series. But also, that data collection at all times will match the level of segmentation of the fleets at which management takes place. In order to achieve the required level of mesh size related disaggregation in the data collection however, it is essential that the mesh size information (together with information on any other selective devices) is included in the log-books. Therefore, the LM recommends that the Commission takes the necessary steps to include this obligation in the Log-book Regulations.

Several RCMs have proposed modifications to the data matrix, more particularly on mergers of neighbouring cells in the matrix. The LM considers that the data matrix should be kept as it is, and that mergers of neighbouring cells in the matrix for sampling purposes "in the field" should only be acceptable if (i) there is reason to believe that the fleets / métiers in neighbouring cells have similar catch compositions, and (ii) there is agreement at the regional level that all MSs apply the same mergers. The RCMs have a major role to play in this process.

The LM wishes to emphasize that mergers can also be considered at the regional level between MSs, e.g. when one of the MSs is not in a position to collect sufficient information on all its fleets or métiers, and agrees with another MS to "borrow" that MS's biological information to fill in the empty cells in its own data matrix. This option however, requires that all MSs take the same approach with respect to their fleet and métier definitions. Again, this is an area where the RCMs have an important contribution to make. The LM recommends that the principle of "mergers" be given thorough consideration in the upcoming revision of the DCR, and that the new DCR contains general rules on the types of mergers that would be acceptable and under which conditions.

The LM notes that there is an anomaly in the data matrixes proposed by the RCMs: under "Demersal seine", the distinction between "Fly shooting seine", "Anchored seine" and "Pair seine" should be made at level 4 (and not at level 5, as is the case now), and the target assemblage under level 5 should be "Demersal fish" for all.



## 5.2. Upcoming meetings on fleet and métier definitions

The LM notes that two important meetings on fleet and métier definitions are planned for the near future:

- One in March 2006 (13-17 March, Nantes, France), where MSs will have the possibility to (i) test the precision and stability of different fleet segmentations for the sampling of economic parameters, and (ii) test whether they can fit their national data into the proposed data matrix; and
- One in June 2006 (12-16 June, also in Nantes), where the final data matrix will be agreed.

The LM insists that all MSs participate to these meetings, since they are the last opportunity to alter / refine the fleet and métier definitions before they are included in the new DCR. For the March 2006 meeting, it is suggested that MSs bring a full dataset of raw data for the year 2003 (i.e. non-aggregated data on landings, revenues, etc. by voyage) for the planned exploratory analysis. It is clear that the datasets will only be used by the national experts during this meeting, and that there is no intention to merge them into an international database of whatever type, nor to use them for any other purpose afterwards.

## 5.3. Recap of relevant RCM comments and recommendations, and LM comments

RCM Baltic	RCM Baltic concludes that MSs must conduct analysis of stability on the national fleet. This analysis could be conducted by comparing the results from segmentation of economic data according to Appendix III in the current segmentation and according to the exclusiveness criteria, suggested in the Nantes report.
LM comment	The LM assumes that this task has been / will be performed by the MSs and that the results will be discussed at the March 2006 workshop in Nantes (see Section 5.2.). MSs, who failed to comply with the RCM recommendation, are urgently requested to bring their data and carry out these analyses during the March 2006 workshop.
RCM Baltic	The RCM Baltic concludes that MS must conduct analysis of national data on which length groups yield the most homogenous economic structure.
LM comment	See previous comment.
RCM Baltic	RCM Baltic concludes that the two analyses [i.e. analysis of stability and analysis of fleet segments for homogeneity - <i>LM rapporteur</i> ] should be conducted before 1st of January 2006. [...] The combined results from the Baltic will then be presented at the next workshop on fleet based approach in the beginning of 2006.
LM comment	See previous comment.
RCM Baltic	RCM Baltic emphasises that biological sampling should only be carried out according to the fishing activity at level 6 and not be based on vessel length categories.

LM comment	See general comments on mergers of neighbouring cells in the data matrix in Section 5.1.
RCM Baltic	The RCM Baltic recommends that all MSs attempt to fill in the matrix with readily available effort data (by default expressed in days at sea and in number of vessels for 2004) with a view to defining the final version of the matrix before the 1st of January 2006.
LM comment	The LM assumes that this task has been / will be performed by the MSs and that the results will be discussed at the March 2006 workshop in Nantes (see Section 5.2.). MSs, who failed to comply with the RCM recommendation, are urgently requested to bring their data and carry out these analyses during the March 2006 workshop.
RCM Baltic	The RCM Baltic recommends that in order to get cost effective and scientifically sound and robust biological sampling schemes, some of the gear types at level 4 in the "Nantes matrix" need to be merged. In the Baltic, such gears are bottom trawl / multi rig trawl, which should be treated as one sampling unit instead of two. Further set gillnet, trammel net and tangle net should be one sampling unit instead of three.
LM comment	See general comments on mergers of neighbouring cells in the data matrix in Section 5.1.
RCM Baltic	The RCM Baltic further recommends that all information on gear used in sampled fishing operations should be recorded, allowing post stratification into the different gears if necessary.
LM comment	See LM's recommendation on adaptation of Log-book Regulation in Section 5.1.
RCM Baltic	The RCM recommends that the countries involved in bottom trawl fishery in the Kattegat (Denmark, Sweden and Germany) analyse existing data and decide on more precise definitions of these fisheries.
LM comment	The LM understands that the proposed analysis aims at defining the criteria to distinguish between the different target assemblages (e.g. Mixed demersal and Crustacean" vs "Demersal fish") under level 5 of the data matrix. The LM agrees with the approach suggested by RCM Baltic. In view of its overall relevance however, the LM suggests that the discussion on these criteria also be held on a wider, European scale.
RCM NS&EA	RCM North Sea reiterates the Nantes recommendation that the fleet segmentation be tested at a national level before the November meeting of SGECA.
LM comment	The LM assumes that this task has been / will be performed by the MSs and that the results will be discussed at the March 2006 workshop in Nantes (see Section 5.2.). MSs, who failed to comply with the RCM recommendation, are urgently requested to bring their data and carry out these analyses during the March 2006 workshop.
RCM NS&EA	RCM North Sea recommends that the EU Commission gives careful consideration to the suggested changes in the fleet segmentation.
LM comment	The LM suggests that the changes suggested by RCM NS&EA be discussed at the upcoming meetings on métier definitions in March and June 2006.

RCM NEA	The RCM NEA recommends that all MSs attempt to fill in the matrix with readily available effort data (by default expressed in days at sea and otherwise to be specified), with a view to defining the final version of the matrix for the revision of the DCR, i.e. before January 2006.
LM comment	The LM assumes that this task has been / will be performed by the MSs and that the results will be discussed at the March 2006 workshop in Nantes (see Section 5.2.). MSs, who failed to comply with the RCM recommendation, are urgently requested to bring their data and carry out these analyses during the March 2006 workshop.
RCM NAFO	RCM NAFO recommends that the reference to mesh size in the EU log-book continues to be collected.
LM comment	See LM's recommendation on adaptation of Log-book Regulation in Section 5.1.
RCM NAFO	RCM NAFO recommends that a sampling program should be developed based on the concept of the defined five fleet segments [see Section 9 of 2005 Report of RCM NAFO for details - <i>LM rapporteur</i> ] as the lowest level of disaggregation.
LM comment	See comment on compatibility of NAFO fleet segments with the métier matrix in Section 5.1.
RCM Medit	During the meeting on small-scale fisheries (Kavala, September 2005) a session should be devoted to discuss the fishery-based approach proposed in the Nantes meeting on fleet/fishery based sampling. During this session, Mediterranean countries will present their segmentation of the fleet and fishing activities in order to propose a regional disaggregation for fishing activities according to this scheme.
LM comment	Regardless of this initiative, the LM insists that all Mediterranean MSs participate in the upcoming meetings on métier definitions in March and June 2006 (also see Section 5.2.).
RCM Medit	The RCM recommends that the fleet segmentation proposed at the Nantes meeting, will be tested at the national level, and that results will be presented for discussion in the next meeting on economic data (Salerno, November 2005).
LM comment	The LM assumes that this task has been / will be performed by the MSs and that the results will be discussed at the March 2006 workshop in Nantes (see Section 5.2.). MSs, who failed to comply with the RCM recommendation, are urgently requested to bring their data and carry out these analyses during the March 2006 workshop.

## 6. Vessels less than 12 m

### 6.1. Discussion of RCM proposals

The LM notes that all RCMs have agreed with the approach proposed at the Kavala meeting to estimate the effort for multi-gear voyages by vessels < 12 m. However, the LM also notes that it may be possible to obtain more accurate information, at least at the population level, by the analysis of log-book data. The LM recommends that, whenever possible, the second approach be adopted.

The LM also notes that different countries are using thresholds in their sampling programmes on < 12 m vessels, particularly for the collection of economic data. In a number of cases, there are indications that the thresholds are used to make the distinction between professional and recreational fishermen. As the SGRN, the LM is of the opinion that this distinction should be made on the basis of other criteria than by means of a fixed threshold based on revenues. For the collection of economic data as such, however, the LM sees no justification for the use of thresholds, and insists that all vessel categories – even the ones with "marginal" landings and revenues – should be sampled. The LM agrees that, at first sight, it may seem a waste of energy to set up sampling programmes for vessels that hardly contribute to the overall landings and revenues of a MS' national fleet but, as the SGRN, the LM is of the opinion that relatively small sample sizes may suffice to obtain sufficiently reliable estimates of the landings and revenues of such vessels.

With regards to effort definitions for vessels < 12 m, the LM supports the RCMs that the term "time at sea", referring to passive gears, be changed to "soak time at sea" in the new version of the DCR.

### 6.2. Recap of relevant RCM comments and recommendations, and LM comments

RCM Baltic	The question of multiple métiers practised during the same fishing trip or days at sea, raises issues on the way to fill the matrix [i.e. the métier data matrix - <i>LM rapporteur</i> ]. In the absence of more detailed information, a common methodology has been proposed during the Kavala meeting. In Kavala, it was concluded that for a vessel using several gears on the same day, each gear would be assigned one effort-day. [...] Further, the Kavala report states that pilot surveys must be carried out to establish a level of precision in the estimation of effort for both active and passive gears. The RCM Baltic recommends adopting this proposal at a first stage.
LM comment	See comment on calculation of effort for multi-gear voyages by vessels less than 12 m in Section 6.1.
RCM NS&EA	RCM North Sea supports the proposal that the effort definitions used for passive gears as defined in DCR Appendix IX, be applied to the Minimum Programme as well, and that the term "time at sea", referring to passive gears, be changed to "soak time at sea".
LM comment	See comment on definition of effort for passive gears in Section 6.1.

RCM NS&EA	It has been proposed that data contributed (number of hooks, traps, nets, length of net and soaking time) should be given separately, not multiplied as stated in the Regulation. The RCM North Sea expressed the view that there should be a better match between the DCR requirements and those for log-book information. Therefore, RCM North Sea recommends a revision of the current Log-book Regulation.
LM comment	The LM agrees with the RCM's proposal. Also see LM's recommendation on adaptation of Log-book Regulation in Section 5.1.
RCM NS&EA	RCM North Sea recommends that revenue threshold for collecting economic data of vessels less than 12 m is discussed at the next SGECA in Salerno, November 2005.
LM comment	See general comments on thresholds in Section 6.1.
RCM NEA	The question of multiple métiers practised during the same fishing trip (or the same month) raises issues on the way to fill the matrix [i.e. the métier data matrix - <i>LM rapporteur</i> ]. In the absence of more detailed information, a common methodology has been proposed during the Workshop on Small-Scale Fisheries (Kavala, September 2005), and the RCM NEA recommends adopting this proposal at a first stage.
LM comment	See comment on calculation of effort for multi-gear voyages by vessels less than 12 m in Section 6.1.
RCM Medit	During the meeting on small-scale fisheries (Kavala, September 2005) a session should be devoted to discuss the fishery-based approach proposed in the Nantes meeting on fleet/fishery based sampling. During this session, Mediterranean countries will present their segmentation of the fleet and fishing activities in order to propose a regional disaggregation for fishing activities according to this scheme.
LM comment	Regardless of this initiative, the LM insists that all Mediterranean MSs participate in the upcoming meetings on métier definitions in March and June 2006 (also see Section 5.2.).

## 7. Ecosystem approach of the DCR

### 7.1. LM's concerns about the extension of the DCR

The LM is concerned that the proposals made in the SGRN Report on Environmental Integration and Move towards an Ecosystem Approach (June 2005) risk to extend the DCR far beyond what was agreed by the STECF. In the report of its April 2005 plenary meeting (20<sup>th</sup> Report of the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries, Section 6.6.2.2.), STECF expressed its opinion on the integration of the ecosystem approach in the DCR as follows:

*While the European Commission, ICES and other groups continue to advance our understanding of an integrated ecosystem approach to fisheries management, a precise definition of the data requirements, as yet, remains elusive. The development of the European Marine Strategy will aid this process. Currently, in the absence of clear guidelines for immediate needs, STECF considers that the ecosystem approach should focus on impact of fisheries on the ecosystem. STECF notes that there will be many data that will prove necessary to an ecosystem approach in the future. However, it is premature to include them at present in the DCR as the eco-quality indicators are not yet defined. As a provisional move STECF considers that data could be collected to provide information on the following:*

- 1 *The spatial and temporal distribution of different fishing activities.*
- 2 *Trends in fish assemblages.*
- 3 *Impact of fishing on species that are intentionally exploited and on unintended by-catch.*
- 4 *Genetic erosion of commercial wild stocks.*

*While these will address the current data requirement for the performance indicators for the greening effect of the CFP as identified in SEC 2004 (29) "Ad hoc expert group on indicators of environmental integration for the CFP" (Brussels Oct 2003), STECF is of the opinion that the evolution of a ecosystem approach will only occur incrementally over time. It is probable that the sampled variables will change with time. Thus, STECF considers that the requirements of the DCR will, likewise, require ongoing adjustment as new information, understanding and methodologies emerge.*

In the LM's opinion, many of the proposals made by the SGRN Expert Group on Environmental Integration and Move towards an Ecosystem Approach, go far beyond the "impact of fisheries on the ecosystem" (e.g. the proposals to include the monitoring of bird and cetacean populations in the DCR, to organise regular surveys for epi- and hyperbenthos, to extend the DCR to also include food web studies, etc.), and this risks making the DCR extremely heavy and costly. The LM also is concerned that an over-ambitious extension of the DCR may result in a negative response from the MSs and in reluctance to agree with the extension as such.

The LM understands that it is the Commission's intention to call for a second expert meeting on environmental integration (June 2006), and strongly recommends that this second meeting takes a more pragmatic approach with regards to the extension of the DCR, in line with the suggestions made by the STECF.

## 7.2. Recap of relevant RCM comments and recommendations, and LM comments

Note: RCM NAFO and RCM Medit met before or at the same time as the SGRN Expert Group on Environmental Integration, and hence were not in a position to express their views on the report of this meeting.

<b>General comments</b>	
RCM NAFO	The RCM NAFO considers that indicators to be collected will depend of the scope of the new ecosystem approach for fisheries management adopted by NAFO and will have to be defined by the group.
LM comment	Although the LM recognises that the scope of the ecosystem approach will be addressed by NAFO, it does not agree with the RCM's suggestion that the definition of the parameters to be collected should be the sole responsibility of a RCM.
<b>Topic: Identification and quantification of species that are sampled using standard survey methodologies but not systematically recorded</b>	
RCM Baltic	The RCM Baltic confirmed that existing survey practice should ensure that all fish species are systematically recorded. [...] In addition, the group considered "value adding" to the existing DCR surveys in the Baltic by inclusion of measurements of additional parameters such as hydrographic and plankton data. However, the use and the costs of including extra parameters need to be evaluated before any decision can be taken.
LM comment	See general comments on extension of the DCR in Section 7.1.
RCM NS&EA	RCM North Sea confirmed that existing survey practice should ensure that all fish species are systematically recorded and measured for length.
LM comment	See general comments on extension of the DCR in Section 7.1.
RCM NEA	RCM NEA recommends that ICES WGDEEP should propose key areas / species to be recorded on a dedicated internationally co-ordinated survey of deepwater resources. At present, the only dedicated survey is the Scottish deepwater survey in ICES area VIb.
LM comment	See general comments on extension of the DCR in Section 7.1. The LM suggests that ICES be approached to further this recommendation (also see Section 15.4.).
<b>Topic: Inclusion of fish species that are currently sampled and contribute substantially to community biomass or production</b>	
RCM Baltic	Sampling of such species would imply a relatively small extra survey effort. However, the age determination of these species will require substantial extra personal resources.
LM comment	See general comments on extension of the DCR in Section 7.1.
RCM NS&EA RCM NEA	All commercially exploited species are identified, counted and aged on surveys but a number of the species which contribute substantially to the biomass are not routinely aged, and some are only identified to genus. [...] For [species list – <i>LM rapporteur</i> ], the additional collection of otoliths and routine age reading will require significant additional resources.

LM comment	See general comments on extension of the DCR in Section 7.1.
<b>Topic: Records of species of special interest</b>	
RCM Baltic	All species of special interest listed in the SGRN report can be recorded in the current DCR surveys without additional resources. A special feature of the Baltic is the common presence of freshwater species.
LM comment	See general comments on extension of the DCR in Section 7.1. The LM suggests that the inclusion of freshwater species in the DCR be discussed during the September 2006 meeting on the biological sampling requirements in the new DCR (also see Section 15.8.).
RCM NS&EA	All species of special interest listed in the SGRN report would be recorded on surveys without additional resources.
LM comment	See general comments on extension of the DCR in Section 7.1.
RCM NEA	All species of special interest listed in the SGRN report would be recorded on surveys without additional resources. However, [...] the expansion of this kind of systematic monitoring to the entire NEA area would demand significant resources.
LM comment	See general comments on extension of the DCR in Section 7.1.
<b>Topic: Acoustic survey records of specific habitats</b>	
RCM Baltic RCM NS&EA	RCM [...] accepted the comments in the SGRN report that acoustic data from routine surveys could be used to characterise some benthic habitats, provided that these were collected, archived and analyzed. Some further equipment might need to be carried on those ships not deploying suitable acoustic equipment at present and resources would be required to carry out the archiving and analysis of the records.
LM comment	See general comments on extension of the DCR in Section 7.1.
RCM NEA	[Similar comment as RCM Baltic and RCM NS&EA - <i>LM rapporteur</i> ] [In addition] RCM notes that existing information on habitat mapping should be fully evaluated before an inclusion of such type of acoustic surveys in the revised DCR can be envisaged.
LM comment	See general comments on extension of the DCR in Section 7.1.
<b>Topic: Monitoring of relative abundance of cetaceans and seabirds</b>	
RCM Baltic RCM NS&EA RCM NEA	RCM [...] accepted that routine monitoring surveys for fish in the [...] could also be used to monitor birds and cetaceans, but this would require additional staff and could not be done effectively using the scientific staff already involved in fish sampling.
LM comment	See general comments on extension of the DCR in Section 7.1.
<b>Topic: Sampling benthos and benthic habitats</b>	
RCM Baltic RCM NS&EA	If abundance and biomass of macrobenthic invertebrate species, particularly those species sensitive to fishing or indicative of sensitive habitats, needs to be quantified, specific benthic trawl surveys would be necessary.
LM comment	See general comments on extension of the DCR in Section 7.1.



RCM NEA	RCM NEA recommends that the ICES Benthos Ecology Working Group be asked to establish an inventory of existing benthos oriented surveys (except meiobenthos) in the NEA area. Based on this information, key areas should be identified that could be monitored systematically.
LM comment	See general comments on extension of the DCR in Section 7.1. The LM suggests that ICES be approached to further this recommendation (also see Section 15.4.).
<b>Topic: Studies on food webs</b>	
RCM Baltic	This can be achieved partly by a resumed stomach sampling within the existing BITS surveys. However, substantial additional resources will be needed for the analyses of the collected stomachs. In addition, evacuation rate experiments need to be conducted.
LM comment	See general comments on extension of the DCR in Section 7.1.
RCM NS&EA	In view of the high level of resources required in both collecting the samples and analysing the data, RCM North Sea did not feel able to reach a consensus on whether this should be included in the revised DCR or should become subject of a dedicated pan-European research project (which would offer the opportunity of participation of non-EU countries).
LM comment	See general comments on extension of the DCR in Section 7.1.
RCM NEA	In view of the high level of resources required in both collecting the samples and analysing the data, RCM NEA recommends that this task should be the subject of a dedicated pan-European research project (which would offer the opportunity of participation of non-EU countries).
LM comment	See general comments on extension of the DCR in Section 7.1.
<b>Topic: Genetic erosion</b>	
RCM Baltic	Sampling for genetic analyses can be done on existing surveys covering most species of interest. However, substantial extra resources would be needed for analyses. Genetic analysis will be of special concern for species which are characterised by more than one stock (e.g. flounder, turbot and some freshwater species). It is imperative to establish the stock identities of these species in order to assess the potential impact of fishing pressure.
LM comment	See general comments on extension of the DCR in Section 7.1.
RCM NS&EA	RCM North Sea suggests that monitoring for genetic erosion can be done on existing surveys covering some key species of interest such as cod, plaice and herring. This would involve taking fin clips at little extra effort on routine monitoring surveys but would require extra resources for analyses.
LM comment	See general comments on extension of the DCR in Section 7.1.
<b>Topic: Fishing effort</b>	
RCM Baltic RCM NS&EA RCM NEA	RCM [...] supported the comments made by SGRN that VMS records from all vessels which have VMS in the [...], should be made available to scientists for analysis (and not only for ecosystem requirements).

LM comment	The LM agrees with this point of view. However, in view of its overall relevance, the LM suggests that the discussion on the accessibility of VMS data also be held on a wider, European scale, within the general framework of the ongoing revision of the DCR.
RCM Baltic	Fishing effort data also need to be sampled from the smallest vessels and in particular the recreational fishery. New tools to estimate the temporal and spatial distribution of fishing effort in recreational/small-scale fishery are needed in order to evaluate their ecosystem effects.
LM comment	The LM agrees with this point of view. Also see general comment on extension of DCR in Section 7.1.
<b>Topic: Catches and discards</b>	
RCM Baltic	The RCM suggests that fresh water species that are included in the current DCR, should be kept in the upcoming DCR.
LM comment	The LM suggests that this issue be discussed during the September 2006 meeting on the biological sampling requirements in the new DCR (also see Section 15.8.).
<b>Other topics</b>	
RCM Baltic	Coastal surveys in the Baltic: The RCM Baltic suggests that the inclusion of these surveys [i.e. surveys in the coastal zone of the Baltic - <i>LM rapporteur</i> ] should be discussed at a national level in order to prepare a future discussion within the DCR.
LM comment	See Sections 8. and 15.7.
RCM Baltic	Freshwater species: The RCM Baltic recommends that whitefish, zander, perch and pike shall be included in the upcoming DCR.
LM comment	The LM suggests that this issue be discussed during the September 2006 meeting on the biological sampling requirements in the new DCR (also see Section 15.8.).
RCM Baltic	Monitoring of recreational fishery: Considering the potential impact on Baltic fish stocks, the RCM Baltic suggest that recreational fisheries should be monitored and sampled within the framework of the upcoming DCR.
LM comment	See previous comment.

## 8. Surveys

### 8.1. Discussion of RCM proposals

Several RCMs have made suggestions (i) to improve the co-ordination of international surveys, (ii) to extend existing surveys, or (iii) to set up new surveys within the framework of the DCR. The LM generally agreed with the proposals on improved co-ordination, but was of the opinion that any extension of existing surveys and any inclusion of new surveys in the DCR should first be discussed at the SGRN Revision Meeting on Surveys, which is scheduled for December 2006.

### 8.2. Recap of relevant RCM comments and recommendations, and LM comments

<b>Topic: Co-ordination of existing surveys</b>	
RCM Baltic	RCM Baltic notes that, in order to ensure the compatibility of acoustic and hydrological background data [of acoustic surveys in the Baltic Sea - <i>LM rapporteur</i> ] and the comprehensive coverage in the Sub-division 32, the use of one research vessel to cover this area is highly recommended.
LM comment	The LM assumes that this proposal is correct and that the necessary steps will be taken to further this recommendation.
RCM Medit	The RCM noted the lack of international co-ordination for the surveys dealing with small pelagic species (sardine and anchovy) and encourages the organization of a planning group on small pelagic surveys. A workshop should also be organized through the DCR, to identify the way for such co-ordination and the possibility for development of small pelagic surveys on a Mediterranean scale. France proposes to organize such a workshop in Sète in the first quarter of 2006.
LM comment	The LM recognises the merits of this proposal and suggests that the RCM submits a proposal for such a planning group to the Commission, either directly, or through the PGCCDBS. The LM also wishes to stress however, that any extension of existing surveys over a wider area should first be discussed at the SGRN Revision Meeting on Surveys in December 2006 (also see Section 15.7.).
<b>Topic: Extensions of existing surveys, new surveys</b>	
RCM Baltic	The RCM Baltic suggests that the inclusion of these surveys [i.e. surveys in the coastal zone of the Baltic - <i>LM rapporteur</i> ] should be discussed at a national level in order to prepare a future discussion within the DCR.
LM comment	See general comment on new surveys in Section 8.1. Also see Section 15.7.
RCM Medit	The RCM recommends that discussion on the possibility for a second season MEDITS should take place during the next MEDITS workshop in Kavala (March 2006).
LM comment	See general comment on new surveys in Section 8.1. Also see Section 15.7.

RCM Medit	The RCM recommended that effort should be placed in order that MEDITS data will be used by the GFCM assessment working groups.
LM comment	The LM recognises the merits of this proposal and expects that the MSs concerned will take the necessary steps to further this recommendation.
<b>Other topics</b>	
RCM NAFO	RCM NAFO underlines that both surveys [i.e. 3M Flemish Cap Survey and Spanish Survey in 3NO - <i>LM rapporteur</i> ] collect very valuable information to evaluate the stocks of the NAFO area and to get samples to study biological parameters. Thus, RCM NAFO strongly recommends that both surveys will continue in the future.
LM comment	This is an issue that needs to be discussed at the SGRN Revision Meeting on Surveys, in December 2006 (also see Section 15.7.).

## 9. Discard sampling

### 9.1. Discussion of RCM proposals

Several RCMs have discussed the MSs' discard sampling programmes for 2006 and have proposed adjustments to these, in order to improve the spatial and/or fleet coverage and the cost-effectiveness of the programmes. The LM acknowledges the efforts made by the RCMs in this field and generally agrees with the principles underlying the proposed adjustments. The LM also considers that this type of "fine-tuning" of the discard sampling programmes should become one of the recurrent tasks of the RCMs.

The LM recognises that, for 2006, the time window is too narrow to seek formal approval of the proposed adjustments by the SGRN. Nevertheless, the LM suggests that the MSs follow the recommendations of the RCMs and adjust their discard sampling programmes accordingly. In their 2006 Technical Reports, MSs should then refer to the relevant RCM recommendations to justify the changes that were made to their discard sampling programmes.

For the future, it is essential that all RCM recommendations on the re-arrangement of discard sampling programmes should be clearly spelled out in the RCM reports. During the 2005 RCM NS&EA e.g., several suggestions were made on the re-allocation of UK discard sampling effort in 2006, but there is no trace of this in the report. This puts the MSs in question in a difficult position, since there is no written evidence to which they can refer to justify changes made in response to the RCM.

### 9.2. Recap of relevant RCM comments and recommendations, and LM comments

Topic: Co-ordination of discard sampling	
RCM NS&EA	RCM North Sea agreed that in order to co-ordinate activities effectively there was a need to develop a better method of presenting the coverage of discard sampling and the Netherlands have agreed to prepare a template based on fleet segmentation (currently under review) and to circulate it before next year's meeting.
LM comment	The LM considers this to be an initiative of primarily regional importance and expects MSs to take the agreed action.
RCM NS&EA RCM NEA	RCM [...] recommends that where discard sampling coverage is restricted to a low level, the country concerned considers whether the inputs from other countries are sufficient and enters into bilateral agreements where appropriate.
LM comment	The LM agrees with the suggested approach and expects that the MSs concerned will act accordingly.
RCM NEA	Several recommendations on the re-arrangement of the discard sampling programmes for 2006 (see Section 8 of 2005 Report of RCM NEA for details).
LM comment	The LM agrees with the proposed changes and expects that the MSs concerned will act accordingly.

<b>Topic: Discard Atlas</b>	
RCM NS&EA	RCM North Sea strongly supports the initiative to develop a Discard Atlas (see Report of June 2005 STECF-SGRN) as it is regarded as a move which would provide useful information to support decision making in the co-ordination of discard surveys.
LM comment	The LM was informed that a kick-off meeting on the Discard Atlas was held in Ispra (Italy), in February 2006, and that a project proposal for the Discard Atlas is currently being written.

## 10. Sampling for 'Other biological parameters'

### 10.1. Discussion of RCM proposals

Several RCMs have discussed the MSs' sampling programmes for "Other biological parameters" (particularly sexual maturity) and have made the first move towards improved international co-ordination of these programmes. Again, the LM is of the opinion that this should become one of the recurrent tasks of the RCMs, and it expects that MSs and RCMs will further the initiatives taken at the 2005 meetings in the years to come.

With respect to the triennial updates of sex ratio, sexual maturity, fecundity and growth (as listed in Appendix XVI of the DCR), the LM suggests that the RCMs consider the possibility of setting up rolling data collection systems, whereby part of the species would be covered in year 1, part in year 2, and the remaining part in year 3. If all MSs within the same region adopt the same rolling system, data collection would become less scattered over time and national datasets could easily be merged to calculate maturity and fecundity ogives, growth curves, etc.

RCM Baltic, RCM NS&EA and RCM NEA each proposed a species-specific workshop to give guidance in collecting and analysing maturity data, with focus on area-specific key species. The LM agreed with these proposals and suggests that the workshops be further discussed at the upcoming meeting of PGCCDBS (February-March 2006) for final approval and inclusion in the list of eligible meetings under the DCR in 2007 (also see Section 12). In view of the outstanding problems with the identification of maturity stages in many fish species and the need for generally approved methods that can be applied on a trans-national scale, the LM also concluded that there is need for a pan-European workshop or short-term study to specify the sampling methodology for sexual maturity studies (spatial and temporal effects, staging, etc.).

### 10.2. Recap of relevant RCM comments and recommendations, and LM comments

<b>Topic: Provision of maturity updates to assessment working groups</b>	
RCM Baltic RCM NS&EA RCM NEA	RCM [...] recommends providing aggregated maturity data to the assessment working groups on a yearly basis for those stocks that are sampled on a routine basis yearly, in a format agreed by the working group.
LM comment	The LM recognises the merits of this proposal and suggests that the issue be discussed during the September 2006 meeting on the biological sampling requirements in the new DCR (also see Section 15.8.).
<b>Topic: Task sharing in relation to sampling for "Other biological parameters"</b>	
RCM Baltic RCM NEA	RCM [...] recommends seeking multilateral agreements to overcome the obligation to provide data for species by MSs that have small catches of these species.
LM comment	The LM agrees with the proposal and expects that the MSs concerned will act accordingly.

RCM NS&EA	RCM North Sea recommends that countries enter into bi- or multilateral agreements in cases where the required level of sampling under the DCR is too low to make a useful contribution to maturity estimates by individual MSs.
LM comment	The LM agrees with the proposal and expects that the MSs concerned will act accordingly.
<b>Topic: Regional initiatives</b>	
RCM Baltic	RCM Baltic recommends that the workshop of WGBIFS sub-group for estimating annual based maturity ogives of cod based on trawl survey data convenes in the last week of January 2006 at MIR, Gdynia, Poland.
LM comment	The LM assumes that this task has been / will be dealt with as proposed by the RCM.
RCM NEA	Belgium has agreed to prepare a synoptic overview of existing sexual maturity information for the years 2003-2005 on demersal fish in ICES Sub-areas VI, VIIa and VIIe-h, along the lines of the overview it made for the RCM North Sea. Spain has agreed to do the same for demersal and pelagic fish in the rest of Sub-area VII and for Sub-areas VIII and IX. Reports to be presented at the 2006 meeting of RCM NEA.
LM comment	The LM recognises the merits of this initiative and expects that the MSs involved will assume the tasks as agreed.
<b>Topic: Proposals for workshops</b>	
RCM Baltic	RCM Baltic recommends setting up specific workshops to give guidance in collecting and analysing maturity data. [...]
LM comment	See Section 12.
RCM NS&EA	RCM North Sea recommends setting up species-specific workshops to give guidance in collecting and analysing maturity data. Plaice was regarded as the best candidate species for a first workshop because the data set is widespread as a result of international market sampling. [...]
LM comment	See Section 12.
RCM NEA	RCM NEA recommends setting up species-specific workshops to give guidance in collecting and analysing maturity data. Megrin was regarded as the best candidate species for a first workshop because there exists good and widespread data trough international market sampling. [...]
LM comment	See Section 12.



## 11. Regional databases and data confidentiality

### 11.1. Discussion of RCM initiatives on regional databases

The LM strongly supports the initiatives in the Baltic and the North Sea area with the FishFrame database, and encourages the other RCMs to also look at the potential of regional databases as warehouses for non-aggregated data or for data with (very) low levels of aggregation. The strength of the initiatives in the Baltic and the North Sea lies in its bottom-up approach, which guarantees full co-operation from all MSs (and even from third countries). The LM sees no reason why regional databases should conflict with the principle that DCR data should be accessible to the Commission. On the contrary, data retrieval by the Commission or its subsidiary expert groups would even become easier, since they would have to address one or two regional databases only instead of a whole series of national databases, to get access to the data.

So far, DIFRES has carried the costs of developing FishFrame, and it seems logical that any further developments of the database itself (e.g. to adapt it to the specificities of other regions than the Baltic, for which it was initially developed) and of the upload protocols between national databases and FishFrame should at least partly be eligible under the DCR. The LM also sees a role here for JRC, who could provide assistance in the development of the data exchange protocols. The LM recommends that these issues be discussed in the proper forums as quickly as possible.

The LM also considered the so-called "data path from original sample collection to assessment working group" proposed by RCM North Sea and approved by RCM Baltic (see Section 8.2. in 2005 Report of RCM NS&EA), and agrees with the suggestions made as part of the "data path", viz. that:

- Quality control of the raw data should be the entire and sole responsibility of the MSs providing data to the regional database(s).
- The calculation of precision levels should be done on the data stored in the regional databases, using common tools developed in an open source environment (R).
- The stock co-ordinators of the assessment working groups would have direct access to the data stored in the regional databases.
- The regional databases would be linked to international platforms (such as the ICES Intercatch) for the actual stock assessments.

Implicitly, this approach provides the possibility of calculating precision levels and of setting sampling targets at the regional level (in order to achieve the required precision levels), which makes more sense than the current system, where MSs are individually responsible for achieving the required precision levels (and hardly succeed in doing so, particularly if their shares in the international landings of the stocks concerned are relatively small).

There was general agreement within the LM that databases with aggregated data (as is presently required by the DCR) are of little use, and that only databases with data by month and rectangle (or even by single voyage) are useful for stock assessment purposes. However, the possible implementation of (regional) databases that would

serve as warehouses for this type of data is very much likely to fuel the discussion on data confidentiality. There was considerable concern within the LM that the rules on data accessibility and confidentiality laid down in the present version of the DCR are insufficient to deal with this, and that there is a need for a much stricter and clearly spelled out data policy in the new DCR.

### 11.2. LM's concerns on data accessibility and confidentiality

The LM shares the North Sea RCM's concerns on the ownership and publication rights of data collected under the DCR, and strongly supports the RCM's recommendation that "the Commission incorporates strict rules on the use of DCR data in the revised version of the DCR, inspired by the experience and the protocols of, amongst others, ICES and IOC."

The LM is also concerned about the fact that data provided to the STECF and its sub-groups are kept for much longer time periods and are used on a much wider scale than is acceptable under the rules of the DCR. The LM insists that the Commission and the Chair of STECF remind members of the STECF of the obligation that data should only be kept for 20 labour days and be deleted afterwards (Article 10 of Commission Regulation (EC) No. 1639/2001).

### 11.3. Recap of relevant RCM comments and recommendations, and LM comments

Topic: Use of FishFrame as a regional database	
RCM Baltic RCM NS&EA	RCM [...] strongly supports the proposal for an expert group to begin the task of developing a set of tools within an open source framework which will provide analysis and precision calculations. These tools will be developed to attach to FishFrame and/or become part of an integrated system.
LM comment	See Section 11.1. and 13.
RCM NS&EA	RCM North Sea recommends that all countries having data on North Sea cod participate in the workshop on FishFrame (January 2006, Copenhagen, Denmark).
LM comment	The LM was informed that the workshop has taken place, and that progress has been made in implementing FishFrame in the North Sea context, with cod as a test-case.
RCM NS&EA	RCM North Sea expects that all institutes having data on North Sea cod for 2004 and 2005 upload these to FishFrame, in order to ensure that the aggregations carried out in FishFrame exactly match those undertaken conventionally by stock co-ordinators, and to allow exploratory analyses of the sampling data to be completed by stock co-ordinators.
LM comment	The LM considers this to be an initiative of potentially pan-European importance and expects MSs to take the agreed action.

<b>Topic: DATRAS database</b>	
RCM Baltic	<p>The RCM Baltic recommended that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Improvement of the DATRAS database is necessary within short period to provide the user of the database with correct as possible data.</li> <li>2. The countries inform the chair of WG BIFS fast whether the institutes can upload the CA data of single species from 1991 to 2001 till 1st of November 2005 within short period. When it is not possible the data which are stored in the database are used for the data checks.</li> <li>3. CA data of the main target species of trawl surveys which are cod, flounder, her-ring and sprat should be checked.</li> <li>4. Checking procedures for biological data which are stored in the different databases (e.g. DATRAS and FishFrame) should be standardized for the Baltic Sea. It is proposed that the tools are available for all countries for checking the data in the institutes.</li> </ol>
LM comment	The LM considers this to be an initiative of primarily regional importance and expects MSs to take the agreed action.
<b>Topic: Data accessibility and confidentiality</b>	
RCM NS&EA	RCM North Sea insists that the Commission incorporates strict rules on the use of DCR data in the revised version of the DCR, inspired by the experience and the protocols of, amongst others, ICES and IOC.
LM comment	See general comments on data accessibility and confidentiality in Section 11.2.

## 12. Workshops

### 12.1. Discussion of RCM proposals on workshops

The RCMs have made several proposals for dedicated workshops on a variety of issues (see Section 12.2. for details). As a rule, the LM decided to transmit these proposals to the PGCCDBS for further discussion, approval and, possibly, inclusion in the list of eligible meetings under the DCR for 2007.

The RCMs are advised to always suggest terms of reference for the workshops they propose, together with details on the venue and the likely chair (if possible). This will avoid problems in finding proper venues and chairs afterwards.

### 12.2. Recap of RCM proposals on workshops and their Terms of Reference

The table underneath gives an overview of the workshop proposals to be considered by the PGCCDBS.

RCM Baltic	<p>RCM Baltic recommends setting up specific workshops to give guidance in collecting and analysing maturity data. Cod was regarded as the best candidate species for a first workshop because there exists good and widespread data through international market sampling. This workshop can serve as a case-study for future workshops on other species.</p> <p>Proposed ToR:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Based on international cod data in the Baltic, execute statistical analyses that evaluate the significance of spatial and temporal effects on age at maturation, sex-ratio and growth rate. Differences in spatial distribution of age groups should also be taken into account.</li> <li>2. If these effects are significant, show the effect of these terms on recent stock assessments.</li> <li>3. Propose a stratification that optimises the precision of the estimates of age at maturation, sex-ratio and growth rate and assess if the current sampling programmes according to the DCR are capable of achieving these goals.</li> <li>4. Advise on the methodology that should be adopted to derive age at maturation, sex-ratio and growth at age with minimum bias, including both market and survey-based sampling.</li> <li>5. Consider the implementation of a reference set of gonad photographs to harmonize the determination of maturity stages across countries.</li> <li>6. Propose a sampling scheme of maturity data for sprat and herring.</li> </ol>
LM comment	To be discussed by the PGCCDBS.
RCM NS&EA	<p>RCM North Sea recommends setting up species-specific workshops to give guidance in collecting and analysing maturity data. RCM North Sea recommends that this workshop is eligible under the DCR.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Continued on next page</i></p>

	<p>Proposed ToR:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Based on international plaice data in the North Sea, execute statistical analyses that evaluate the significance of spatial and temporal effects on age at maturation, sex-ratio and growth rate. Differences in spatial distribution of age groups should also be taken into account.</li> <li>2. If these effects are significant, show the effect of these terms on recent stock assessments.</li> <li>3. Propose a stratification that optimises the precision of the estimates of age at maturation, sex-ratio and growth rate and assess whether the current sampling programs according to the DCR are capable of achieving these goals.</li> <li>4. Advise on the methodology that should be adopted to derive age at maturation, sex-ratio and growth at age with minimum bias, including both market and survey-based sampling.</li> <li>5. Consider the implementation of a reference set of gonad photographs to harmonize the determination of maturity stages across countries.</li> </ol>
LM comment	To be discussed by the PGCCDBS.
RCM NEA	<p>RCM NEA recommends setting up species-specific workshops to give guidance in collecting and analysing maturity data. Megrin was regarded as the best candidate species for a first workshop because there exists good and widespread data through international market sampling. This workshop can serve as a case-study for future workshops on other species.</p> <p>Proposed ToR:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Based on international Megrin data in the North East Atlantic, execute statistical analyses that evaluate the significance of spatial and temporal effects on age at maturation, sex-ratio and growth rate. Differences in spatial distribution of age groups should also be taken into account.</li> <li>2. If these effects are significant, show the effect of these terms on recent stock assessments.</li> <li>3. Propose a stratification that optimises the precision of the estimates of age at maturation, sex-ratio and growth rate and assess if the current sampling programmes according to the DCR are capable of achieving these goals.</li> <li>4. Advise on the methodology that should be adopted to derive age at maturation, sex-ratio and growth at age with minimum bias, including both market and survey-based sampling.</li> <li>5. Consider the implementation of a reference set of gonad photographs to harmonize the determination of maturity stages across countries.</li> </ol>
LM comment	To be discussed by the PGCCDBS.
RCM NEA	<p>The RCM recommends that the EU Commission be approached to support a workshop that would carry out an inter-calibration exercise in relation to identifying and counting <i>Nephrops</i> burrows from underwater TV survey data.</p> <p>No terms of reference proposed [<i>LM rapporteur</i>].</p>

LM comment	To be discussed by the PGCCDBS. The LM notes that this workshop has already been proposed in 2004 by both the RCM North Sea and the RCM NEA, but that this proposal has never been taken forward.
RCM Medit	It is recommended that PGCCDBS includes <i>Pagellus erythrinus</i> and <i>Trachurus mediterraneus</i> in the otolith exchange scheme.
LM comment	To be discussed by the PGCCDBS.

## 13. Small-scale studies

### 13.1. Discussion of RCM proposals on small-scale studies

The reports of the RCMs contain several proposals for small-scale studies. Except for the one on the development of a set of tools for analysis and precision calculations however, the information provided was insufficient to appreciate the actual contents of the proposals or their link with the DCR. For future submissions, the LM:

- Reminds MSs and RCMs that the "spheres of activity" which may be covered by small-scale studies under the DCR are specified in Article 9 of Council Decision 2000/439/EC (June 29<sup>th</sup> 2000).
- Urges MSs and RCMs to carefully examine whether their proposals for small-scale studies match these conditions, and to which extent the proposed studies overlap with other ongoing or planned initiatives (other studies, projects and concerted actions, workshops, etc.).
- Urges MSs and RCMs to provide a short description of the aim and contents of the proposed studies, together with details on the MSs and institutes involved in the study, its likely duration and a rough estimate of its total cost.

### 13.2. Recap of RCM proposals on small-scale studies, and LM comments

RCM Baltic	Proposed small-scale studies: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Development of methods for separation of Baltic cod stocks.</li> <li>2. Development of tools to evaluate the quality of stock assessment input data.</li> <li>3. Evaluation of the indices based on surveys as input for the assessment.</li> <li>4. Implementation of otolith weights as age determination of cod.</li> <li>5. Validation of the results obtained by self-sampling programmes.</li> </ol>
LM comment	Insufficient information to assess relevance of proposed studies.
RC NS&EA	RCM North Sea strongly supports the proposal for an expert group to begin the task of developing a set of tools within an open source framework, which will provide analysis and precision calculations.
LM comment	The LM strongly supports this proposal. Also see Section 11.1.
RCM NAFO	Proposed small-scale studies: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Improvement of methodologies to estimate the level of precision and the required sample size.</li> <li>2. Trial to estimate the spawning stock biomass of Greenland halibut.</li> <li>3. Improvement of methodologies to combine and create multiple MS Age-Length-Keys and their effects on assessments (application for Greenland halibut).</li> <li>4. Improvement of methodology to estimate age of skates.</li> </ol>
LM comment	Insufficient information to assess relevance of proposed studies.

## 14. Commitment of MSs to RCM recommendations

The LM shares the opinion of RCM NS&EA on the commitment of MSs to RCM recommendations and initiatives. In the 2005 Report of RCM NS&EA, this opinion is worded as follows:

*The RCMs were established to improve the overall quality of technical, biological and economic data in support of the CFP, through task and cost sharing, data pooling and, in general, all bilateral, regional and pan-European initiatives that can help increase the accuracy, effectiveness and cost-efficiency of data collection. As such, the RCMs are an essential and integral part of the DCR-machinery, and it is in the MS' general interest to duly consider the RCMs recommendations and to closely follow up their initiatives and concerted actions.*

*Although there is no formal obligation to do so, the RCM North Sea considers that a MS's agreement with the recommendations of a RCM or with its initiatives to set up concerted actions implies that the MS will take the necessary steps to implement these recommendations and to participate in the proposed actions.*

The Chair of SGRN informed the LM that in their future National Programme Proposals and Technical Reports, MSs will have to provide details on the follow-up that is planned / has been given to the RCMs' recommendations and initiatives for concerted actions.

In the opinion of the LM, the regular follow-up of their own recommendations and initiatives for concerted actions should be one of the recurrent tasks of the RCMs. To that aim, every year, the RCMs should:

- Review and evaluate the progress made on the issues that were addressed the preceding year(s).
- Review the arrangements on the sampling of foreign flag vessels, including those by and in third countries. As landing practices are likely to change over time, regular reviews of these arrangements are of particular importance to the DCR and its implementation "in the field".



## 15. Issues raised in RCM reports for consideration by Commission, ICES, national authorities, DCR revision meetings, etc.

### 15.1. General comment by LM

In addition to the issues discussed in the previous sections of this report, the RCMs have made a large number of comments and recommendations on a wide range of issues. Some of these are of strictly regional relevance, while others address issues that will need to be considered by the Commission, ICES, the MSs' national authorities or the expert groups responsible for the revision of the DCR. The LM decided to list all these suggestions and recommendations by addressee, without however commenting on them.

### 15.2. Recommendations for consideration by the European Commission

RCM Baltic RCM NS&EA RCM NEA	RCM [...] supported the comments made by SGRN that VMS records from all vessels which have VMS in the [...], should be made available to scientists for analysis (and not only for ecosystem requirements).
RCM NS&EA	It has been proposed that data contributed (number of hooks, traps, nets, length of net and soaking time) should be given separately, not multiplied as stated in the Regulation. The RCM North Sea expressed the view that there should be a better match between the DCR requirements and those for log-book information. Therefore, RCM North Sea recommends a revision of the current Log-book Regulation.
RCM NS&EA	RCM North Sea is not in favour of the idea of cutting down the number of qualified age reading centres to only one or two per species for the entire DCR area.
RCM NS&EA	RCM North Sea insists that the Commission incorporates strict rules on the use of DCR data in the revised version of the DCR, inspired by the experience and the protocols of, amongst others, ICES and IOC.
RCM NAFO	RCM NAFO recommends that the reference to mesh size in the EU logbook continue to be collected.
RCM Medit	The RCM stresses the importance of participation at the GFCM scientific meetings related to assessments and using DCR data. Therefore, the RCM enquires on the possibility of funding the participation of MSs in these meetings by the EC.

### 15.3. Recommendations for consideration by the European Commission, ICES and the RCMs

RCM NS&EA	RCM North Sea suggested that ICES assessment expert groups could make data requests directly to the RCM and that close communication links between these two parties might be fruitful in the future.
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#### 15.4. Recommendations for consideration by ICES

RCM NEA	RCM NEA recommends that ICES WGDEEP should propose key areas / species to be recorded on a dedicated internationally co-ordinated survey of deepwater resources. At present, the only dedicated survey is the Scottish deepwater survey in ICES area VIb.
RCM NEA	RCM NEA recommends that the ICES Benthos Ecology Working Group be asked to establish an inventory of existing benthos oriented surveys (except meiobenthos) in the NEA area. Based on this information, key areas should be identified that could be monitored systematically.

#### 15.5. Recommendations for consideration by the PGCCDBS

RCM NS&EA	RCM North Sea recommends that PGCCDBS considers the issue of self-sampling with a view to proposing guidelines for the execution, validation and quality assurance of such sampling programs.
RCM Baltic RCM NS&EA RCM NEA	Several proposals for workshops on sexual maturity. See Section 12 for details.
RCM NEA	The RCM recommends that the EU Commission be approached to support a workshop that would carry out an inter-calibration exercise in relation to identifying and counting <i>Nephrops</i> burrows from underwater TV survey data.
RCM Medit	It is recommended that PGCCDBS includes <i>Pagellus erythrinus</i> and <i>Trachurus mediterraneus</i> in the otolith exchange scheme.

#### 15.6. Recommendations for consideration by the MSS' national authorities

RCM NS&EA	RCM North Sea strongly encourages relevant national authorities to combine their efforts in developing measures against unreported landings in the future.
RCM NAFO	Up to now, the EC position has been to clearly distinguish between NAFO observers, with an enforcement and control purpose, and scientific observers, with a scientific purpose. Accordingly, both tasks have been clearly separated in the past. Nevertheless, it is to be noted that at the last STACTIC1 meeting (April, 2005), a new proposal to extend the NAFO observers tasks to also cover biological sampling has been submitted by Ukraine.  RCM NAFO recommends that, whatever the decision is in relation to scientific observers vs. NAFO observers, the quality of the data for scientific purposes should be ensured.

**15.7. Recommendations for consideration by the DCR revision meeting on scientific evaluation surveys (December 2006)**

RCM Baltic	Coastal surveys in the Baltic: The RCM Baltic suggests that the inclusion of these surveys [i.e. surveys in the coastal zone of the Baltic - <i>LM rapporteur</i> ] should be discussed at a national level in order to prepare a future discussion within the DCR.
RCM Baltic	RCM Baltic notes that in order to ensure the compatibility of acoustic and hydrological background data, and the comprehensive coverage in the Sub-division 32, the use of one research vessel to cover this area is highly recommended.
RCM NAFO	RCM NAFO underlines that both surveys [i.e. 3M Flemish Cap Survey and Spanish Survey in 3NO - <i>LM rapporteur</i> ] collect very valuable information to evaluate the stocks of the NAFO area and to get samples to study biological parameters. Thus, RCM NAFO strongly recommends that both surveys will continue in the future.
RCM Medit	The RCM recommends that discussion on the possibility for a second season MEDITS should take place during the next MEDITS workshop in Kavala (March 2006).
RCM Medit	The RCM noted the lack of international co-ordination for the surveys dealing with small pelagic species (sardine and anchovy) and encourages the organization of a planning group on small pelagic surveys. A workshop should also be organized through the DCR, to identify the way for such co-ordination and the possibility for development of small pelagic surveys on a Mediterranean scale. France proposes to organize such a workshop in Sète in the first quarter of 2006.

**15.8. Recommendations for consideration by the DCR revision meeting on biological data requirements (September 2006)**

RCM Baltic RCM NS&EA RCM NEA	RCM [...] recommends providing aggregated maturity data to the assessment working groups on a yearly basis for those stocks that are sampled on a routine basis yearly, in a format agreed by the working group.
RCM Baltic	All species of special interest listed in the SGRN report can be recorded in the current DCR surveys without additional resources. A special feature of the Baltic is the common presence of freshwater species.
RCM Baltic	The RCM suggests that fresh water species that are included in the current DCR should be kept in the upcoming DCR.
RCM Baltic	The RCM Baltic recommends that whitefish, zander, perch and pike shall be included in the upcoming DCR.
RCM Baltic	The RCM Baltic suggests that recreational fisheries should be monitored and sampled within the framework of the upcoming DCR.

RCM NS&EA	RCM North Sea supports the proposal that the effort definitions used for passive gears as defined in DCR Appendix IX, be applied to the Minimum Programme as well, and that the term "time at sea", referring to passive gears, be changed to "soak time at sea".
RCM NAFO	RCM NAFO recommends that the precision targets should be established at the Community level.

### **15.9. Recommendations for consideration by the DCR revision meeting on environmental integration (June 2006)**

All RCMs	Over 30 comments, suggestions and recommendations on environmental integration and move towards an ecosystem approach of the DCR. See Section 7.2. for details.
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### **15.10. Recommendations for consideration by the DCR revision meeting on economic data requirements (if any)**

RCM NS&EA	RCM North Sea recommends that revenue threshold for collecting economic data of vessels less than 12 m is discussed at the next SGECA in Salerno, November 2005.
RCM NAFO	RCM NAFO recommends that the area level should be included in the stratification used to collect the economic information. RCM NAFO also recommends that confidentiality issues introduced by this approach will have to be considered.

### **15.11. Recommendations to be taken forward by the RCMs**

RCM NS&EA	RCM North Sea insists that all countries participate in the exercise of comparing sampling strategies on commercial catches and discards by providing the relevant information to the Swedish co-ordinators.
RCM NS&EA	RCM North Sea agreed that in order to co-ordinate activities effectively there was a need to develop a better method of presenting the coverage of discard sampling and the Netherlands have agreed to prepare a template based on fleet segmentation (currently under review) and to circulate it before next year's meeting.
RCM NEA	Belgium has agreed to prepare a synoptic overview of existing sexual maturity information for the years 2003-2005 on demersal fish in ICES Sub-areas VI, VIIa and VIIe-h, along the lines of the overview it made for the RCM North Sea. Spain has agreed to do the same for demersal and pelagic fish in the rest of Sub-area VII and for Sub-areas VIII and IX. Reports to be presented at the 2006 meeting of RCM NEA.
RCM NAFO	RCM NAFO recommends that all the Member States involved in the fisheries in the NAFO area attend future meetings.
RCM Medit	Effort should be placed in order MEDITS data will be used by the GFCM assessment working groups.

## 15.12. Recommendations to be taken forward by the MSs in bilateral negotiations

RCM NS&EA RCM NEA	RCM [...] recommends that where discard sampling coverage is restricted to a low level, the country concerned considers whether the inputs from other countries are sufficient and enters into bilateral agreements where appropriate.
RCM Baltic RCM NEA	RCM [...] recommends seeking multilateral agreements to overcome the obligation to provide data for species by MSs that have small catches of these species.
RCM NS&EA	<p>The RCM North Sea reiterates its 2004 recommendation on the conclusion of formal bilateral agreements on the sampling of foreign flag vessels, and on the inclusion of these agreements in the MSs' national program proposals.</p> <p>RCM North Sea understands that certain countries/institutes may have legal objections against signing formal bilateral agreements. RCM North Sea insists that agreement be reached between the countries/institutes concerned on the sampling of each other's flag vessels, and that the commitments made are clearly spelled out in the national program proposals.</p>
RCM NS&EA	RCM North Sea recommends that countries enter into bi- or multilateral agreements in cases where the required level of sampling under the DCR is too low to make a useful contribution to maturity estimates by individual member states.
RCM NAFO	RCM NAFO recommends that sampling programmes be co-ordinated among countries in bilateral or multilateral agreements, in order to achieve the precision levels.

## 16. 2006 meetings of RCMs

RCM Baltic	RCM Baltic has decided that Johan Modin from Sweden will be the next Chair, and the next meeting will be held in Lysekil, Sweden during 16-20 October 2006.
RCM NS&EA	RCM North Sea decided that Jørgen Dalskov from Denmark should be the next Chair and the next meeting will be held in The Hague, the Netherlands during the week 25-29 September 2006.
RCM NEA	The next meeting of the RCM for the North East Atlantic will take place from 2-6 October 2006 in IPIMAR, Lisbon, Portugal, with Graça Pestana as Chair.
RCM NAFO	RCM NAFO recommends that the chair of the RCM should hold the position for a period of two year, and try to ensure that all recommendations are followed up and actioned. Hilario Murua will act as RCM NAFO Chair until the RCM NAFO meeting of 2007.
RCM Medit	The next meeting of the RCM for the Mediterranean will take place in Malta in April 2006.