



**International Council for the Exploration  
of the Sea (ICES)**

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Date: 20 July 2015  
Our reference: 1415/PAC 141  
Subject: Setting of reference points

Dear Mr Kirkegaard,

On behalf of the Pelagic Advisory Council and the Baltic Sea Advisory Council we would like to raise our concern about how, when and where biomass and fishing mortality reference points, including MSY reference points, are being calculated.

In recent years ICES has opened part of its advisory process to stakeholders by allowing them to participate as observers in workshops, benchmarks and advice drafting groups. This decision by ICES has been highly appreciated by the Advisory Councils and has greatly facilitated mutual understanding, resulting in a more validated scientific advice. Whereas previously scientists and stakeholders often met each other with a lack of understanding, ICES' policy of encouraging stakeholder participation has resulted in both parties taking ownership of management strategies and reference points such as  $F_{msy}$ . Reference points are no longer being viewed as random variables chosen in an untransparent process, but as a valuable mechanism indispensable for managing fish stocks in a thorough way.

However, we think that this positive development is now being challenged by the recent decision, during a rather generic workshop (WKMSYREF), to change  $F_{msy}$  reference points for selected North Sea and Baltic Sea stocks at the request of the EU and for two other stocks not mentioned in the EU request. Whereas previously, reference points have been defined at benchmark meetings focusing on a very limited number of stocks and bringing together all scientific experts on these stocks as well as relevant stakeholders, WKMSYREF, besides dealing with other issues, calculated reference points for 18 fish stocks, two nephrops stocks and two data-limited stocks, covering three ecoregions.



Although this workshop was open to stakeholder participation, the work itself was not perceived as accessible, triggering the fear that ICES is moving back to an untransparent process in which the basis for setting reference points is only understood by a small number of ICES members. Furthermore, this workshop has created insecurity as regards the timing of new reference points. Will these be defined and implemented at the next benchmark meeting, the next management strategy evaluation, or anytime, as requested throughout the advisory process? What will be the consequences of this for long-term management?

We look forward to receiving your response to our concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Ian Gatt'.

Ian Gatt  
Chair Pelagic AC

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Reine Johansson'.

Reine Johansson  
Chair Baltic Sea AC

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Piotr Predki'.

Piotr Predki  
Vice-chair Baltic Sea AC