



European Commission
Directorate-General Fisheries
c/o Mr Fokion Fotiadis
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Date: 8 October 2007
Our reference: PRAC07.31/AC
Subject: Recommendations Pelagic RAC

Dear Mr Fotiadis,

The Pelagic RAC is pleased to submit its recommendations on various herring stocks for which the ICES/ACFM advice has come out recently. The recommendations have the support of both the industry and the other interest groups.

We would like to ask you to take our viewpoints into consideration at the upcoming negotiations with third countries and in the establishment of the TACs for 2008.

In accordance with article 18 of the articles of association of the Pelagic RAC, a copy of this letter has been sent to the Member States concerned and to the Advisory Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture.

The Pelagic RAC looks forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

c/o

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Ingild Harkes', written over a horizontal line.

Ingild Harkes
Pelagic RAC secretariat

c.c. Mr Kenneth Patterson, Mr Penas-Lado, Mr Emmanouil Papaioannou, Mr Poul Degnbol.

Recommendations September 2007

Herring Irish Sea Div VII (North)

Recommendation:

- The advice is adopted without comment.

Herring Celtic Sea and Div VIIj

For 2008, ACFM has advised that no fishery should proceed on this stock without a rebuilding plan being in place. In order to provide for this, the Celtic Sea Herring Management Advisory Committee (CSHMAC) has drawn up a plan which applies to the years 2007-2010.

Recommendations:

- The TAC for 2008 should be set at the same level as 2007.
- The Commission is to take note of the proposal put forward by the Celtic Sea Herring Management Advisory Committee (included as annex A) with the request to forward this plan to ICES for scientific scrutiny.

Herring Div VIa South and VIIbc

For this stock, ACFM has also advised that no fishery should proceed without a rebuilding plan being in place. As there is disagreement between scientists and industry about the size of the stock, a plan which is fully supported by the RAC, is proposed to improve the stock assessment.

Recommendations:

- The Commission is to take note of a proposal for a pilot study (included as annex B) which has been designed to improve the acoustic surveys and hence come to a better assessment of the stock.
- Pending the outcome of the new stock assessment, the TAC for 2008 should be set at the same level as 2007.

Herring Div VIa North (west of Scotland)

The level of quality of the assessment leads to discussions on how to improve the surveys. Until this data is available, it is suggested to follow clause 2e of the proposed management plan, which states that in case of uncertainty in available data a precautionary TAC reduction of 10% should be agreed on.

Recommendations:

- The Pelagic RAC will formulate a recommendation on this stock in November 2007 when more explicit plans with regard to the assessment are expected to be available.

- In the mean time, the Pelagic RAC recommends a TAC of 30,600 tons, which represents a 10% cut of the TAC of 2007.

Herring subdiv 22-24 and Div IIIa (Baltic spring spawners)

Members of the Pelagic RAC have met with representatives of ICES and discussed the assessment of the stock. The meeting identified a number of uncertainties in the assessment. Given the uncertainty in the assessment, the RAC cannot justify any TAC recommendation for 2008.

Recommendations:

- The Pelagic RAC will not put forward a recommendation on this stock.
- The Commission should develop a formula for the setting of the TAC in area IIIa for fleets C and D.

Herring subarea IV, Div VIId and Div IIIa (North Sea herring)

This stock has now seen poor recruitment for the last 6 years. However, according to ACFM, medium term simulations show that if this reduced recruitment continues, a new balance between SSB and catches will be established with SSB around 1.1 million tons and catches between 200.000 and 240.000 tons. The recommendation attempts to find this new balance. The goal in the present Management Plan of bringing the SSB back to or above Bpa is postponed.

Instead the next 3 years should be used to find the causes for the reduced recruitment and the Commission should specifically request ICES to let the Herring Assessment Working Group recalculate the reference points based on today's science.

Recommendations:

- Postpone the review of the harvest control rule until 2010.
- Take a time-out for 3 years.
- Use these next 3 years to (let ICES):
 - Find the reasons for the poor recruitment of North Sea herring.
 - Establish robust reference points (by the Herring Assessment Working Group).
 - Make a proposal for a new management plan/HCR.
- Assuming that F remains below 0,25 the TAC for each of the next 3 years should be set at:
 - Fleet A: 220.000 tons.
 - Fleet C: 13.000 tons North Sea herring.

Annex A

Rebuilding Plan

Celtic Sea and Division VIIj herring

Proposal by the Celtic Sea Herring Management Advisory Committee

July 2007

Background

In 2006, ICES advised that no fishery should proceed on this stock without a rebuilding plan being in place. The Celtic Sea Herring Management Advisory Committee (CSHMAC) therefore began developing a rebuilding plan. This plan applies to the years 2007-2010. It is initially being presented to the Pelagic RAC. The plan will be referred to ICES, which will be asked to advise on its conformity with the Precautionary Approach to fisheries management.

RECOVERY PLAN 2008 -2010

1. TAC for 2007 is reduced by 15%, relative to 2006. This equates to a TAC in 2007 of 9 393 t. In the subsequent years, 2008, 2009 and 2010 the TAC will be fixed at 9 393t.¹
2. Spawning Box C (Sub-Division VIIaS) will be closed indefinitely for the years 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010.
 - a. A sentinel fishery will be permitted in this box, up to a maximum quota of 646t, for vessels < 50 ft only, or such other single trawl vessels² as may be deemed appropriate by management. This will facilitate intensive sampling of catches. This is necessary to help measure the strength of recruitment.
3. A new recruit survey will be conducted by the Marine Institute. This survey will improve the predictive power of the assessment and help to improve quantification of strength of incoming year classes.
4. The TAC provision in Point 1 above will be adjusted in the event of improvements or deterioration of the stock status as shown by ICES.

¹ Attention is drawn to a proposal to the Pelagic RAC on the tolerance level for water in fish landings. The outcome of possible negotiations with the European Commission may result in changes to point 1 above.

² Single trawl as opposed to pair trawl.

Pilot Acoustic Survey on Northwest Ireland Herring (VIa S VII bc)

September 2007

Background

The herring stock in ICES Divisions VIaS and VIIbc is composed of both autumn and winter/spring spawning components. Ireland and the Netherlands share the TAC for this stock, though Irish vessels now mainly exploit it. Herring fisheries are an important component of the Irish pelagic fishing industry and support several processing factories on-shore.

The fishing industry contends that this stock is healthier than the ICES advice suggests. This more optimistic perception of stock size, has led to a series of discussions between the Irish industry and Irish Marine Institute scientists leading to a decision to conduct a scientific programme to elucidate stock size. In particular, the industry is concerned that acoustic surveys conducted to date, have not been adequate to measure stock size.

During November/December 2007 and January/February 2008 two Pilot Acoustic Surveys will be conducted on this stock, incorporating industry information and concerns, in a design that achieves a synoptic coverage of the herring stock in ICES Divisions VIaS and VIIbc. The survey will be conducted by specialists contracting scientists, with the full support and supervision of the Irish Marine Institute. A brief summary of the project is outlined below.

Summary Pilot Acoustic Surveys Herring VIa S, VIIbc

- 1 Two synoptic acoustic surveys, of the herring in ICES Divisions VIaS and VIIbc, will be conducted in November/December 2007 and in January/February 2008. The survey design will incorporate industry concerns about current acoustic surveys.
- 2 These surveys will be conducted simultaneously on three commercial pelagic fishing vessels, each equipped with a scientific echo-sounder. Each vessel will be accompanied by its partner vessel, the latter engaged in scouting and fishing operations.
- 3 The echo-sounders, property of the Irish Marine Institute, will be calibrated, maintained and operated by the specialists contractors on board the vessels, in accordance with ICES protocols.
- 4 The biological sampling will be conducted in accordance with relevant protocols.
- 5 A final report will be presented to ICES, the Pelagic RAC and the European Commission.

- 6 The specialists contractors will obtain peer review of the survey methodology and results through ICES.
- 7 Close cooperation will be maintained with the Marine Institute and the Irish fishing industry at every stage of the process, in the design, implementation, analysis and dissemination of results stages. Every effort will be made to address industry concerns. At all times during the pilot project the Marine Institute will maintain a supervisory role.

Recommendation for Herring TAC 2008 in VIa S, VIIbc

In light of the extensive pilot acoustic surveys outlined above to be carried out at the end of this year and start of next year and the uncertainties that exist with the present assessment the Irish fishing industry is recommending that the TAC for 2008 be set at the same level as the 2007 TAC.

Sean O Donoghue
Killybegs Fishermen's Organisation