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Date: 7 May 2010
Our reference: 0910PRAC67/AC
Subject: New information on NS herring stock status
CC: Mr Patrick Daniel, Ms Isabelle Viallon (by e-mail)

Dear Mr Ernesto Penas-Lado,

The Pelagic RAC understands that during the 2010 ICES Herring Assessment Working Group (HAWG) a comparison between last year's and this year's estimations of the Spawning Stock Biomass (SSB) and the fishing mortality (F) in 2010, showed a substantial difference. The PRAC understands that scientific assessments are subject to uncertainties and that, each year, the HAWG revises the figures when new, and more reliable, information from the surveys and official landings data becomes available. However, we understand that this year's exercise has resulted in the SSB being re-estimated to 1.29 million tonnes, from the original estimate of less than 1 million tonnes. Similarly, the HAWG concluded that the realised fishing mortality in 2010 will be 0.11; i.e. almost half of the F that the HCR would have otherwise prescribed. The revision helps to explain some of the "missing" recruitment that has been a feature of ICES reports in recent years.

We are, of course, very pleased that the North Sea herring stock has been found to be in a much better condition than was originally thought by the scientific community. We accept that this information will only be confirmed officially in the ICES advice which will be available in two months from now, but we can already address the problem of deciding how to respond to the changed status of both the stock and fishing mortality as soon as possible. As you know the TAC for the current year imposed a reduction of some 4% upon the industry in comparison to 2009. Had the scientists been aware last year of what has become apparent now, then an increase rather than a reduction in the TAC would have been the case.



In the past, the pelagic industry has been confronted with emergency measures taken to reduce TACs when a reduction in stock size was indicated by a retrospective analysis (1996). There is no doubt that the RAC will come under pressure from some of its stakeholders to respond to the currently changed situation as well.

I am, therefore, writing to seek your advice as to how these new scientific insights can best be dealt with at present. When we spoke in La Coruña you suggested that given time lines the best approach could be to refer the matter to the next STECF meeting. This review process clearly will involve some substantial consideration by all parties involved, notably also among the stakeholders in the PRAC. Considering that the North Sea herring fishery is fast approaching we should be grateful if the Commission could request STECF to urgently review the current situation with regard to North Sea herring to allow for a decision to be made within a relevant timeframe.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Iain MacSween'.

Mr Iain MacSween
President of the Pelagic RAC