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Date: 11 October 2013
Our reference: 1314/PRAC12
Subject: Fishing opportunities blue whiting, horse mackerel and boarfish
CC: Ms Martine Aussems, Ms Evangelia Georgitsi (by email)

Dear Ms Evans,

At its latest Working Group II meeting on 3 October 2013 the Pelagic RAC discussed the ICES advice regarding fishing opportunities in 2014 for blue whiting, western horse mackerel, North Sea horse mackerel, southern horse mackerel and boarfish and agreed on a number of recommendations which were subsequently unanimously endorsed by the Executive Committee.

Please find the detailed recommendation in annex 1 and do not hesitate to contact me in case you have any questions.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'V. Ohms', is written in a cursive style.

Verena Ohms
Executive Secretary Pelagic RAC

Annex 1: Recommendation on fishing opportunities for blue whiting, western horse mackerel, North Sea horse mackerel, southern horse mackerel and boarfish in 2014.

1) Blue whiting

The Pelagic RAC notes major changes in this year's ICES advice compared to the previous year. In the NEAFC request a fishing mortality range between 0.18 and 0.3 is given while the recently published ICES advice provides an $F_{0.1}$ value of 0.22 and F_{msy} value of 0.30.

Given the huge changes in the ICES advice and the fact that the advice was only published on the day of the meeting the Pelagic RAC does not have sufficient time to present a precise TAC figure. However, it is strongly recommended that an immediate and thorough evaluation of the Pelagic RAC management plan is performed by ICES.

2) Western horse mackerel

In light of the recent ICES advice to the EU special request dealing with the evaluation of the management plan developed by the Pelagic RAC in 2007, the Pelagic RAC considers it of uttermost importance that ICES as requested in the special request but was not in position to do so, gives clear advice on how to improve the management plan for it to be robust to two or more years of poor recruitment. Furthermore and equally as important the Pelagic RAC requests that in advance of advising in improvements to the plan ICES addresses and rectifies the assessment problems, particularly the selectivity issue. Throughout this process the Pelagic RAC will be happy to support the scientific work needed to achieve these objectives. Regarding the TAC for next year the Pelagic RAC advises in the absence of an ICES approved management plan that the MSY advice is used. It recommends phasing this in over the next two years with the largest cut in TAC in 2014.

The Pelagic RAC recommends a TAC reduction of 47.000 tons (instead of 73.000 tons as proposed by ICES) in 2014 leading to a TAC of 136.000 tons in 2014. A further reduction is proposed for the 2015 TAC to reach the MSY advice of 110.000 tons in 2015. Should a revised management plan be approved by ICES during 2014 the Pelagic RAC recommends that the advice derived from the plan be used for setting the TAC in 2015.

In the meanwhile every endeavour has to be made to have a new management plan evaluated in 2014.

3) North Sea horse mackerel

Last year the Pelagic RAC pointed out that its main objective regarding the North Sea horse mackerel stock is the development of a long-term management plan for this stock. While efforts have proceeded rapidly over the past months and preliminary modelling results evaluating different harvest control rules have already been performed, a fully advanced management plan cannot yet be submitted to the Commission. However, it is envisaged to submit a management plan before summer 2014 at the latest.

In the meantime the Pelagic RAC advises following the TAC setting procedure agreed upon last year which foresees a stepwise reduction in TAC from 2013 to 2015. This gradual reduction is calculated by taking the difference between the TAC for 2012 and the ICES advice for 2013 and dividing this number by three:

- TAC 2012: 44,180 tons
- ICES advice 2013: 25,500 tons

- $(44,180 - 25,500)/3$: 6,230 tons

Each year the TAC shall be reduced by 6,230 tons which will result in the following TACs:

- 2013: 37,950 tons
- 2014: 31,720 tons
- 2015: 25,500 tons

Hence, the Pelagic RAC advises setting the TAC in 2014 at 31.720 tons. Should a management plan be developed and evaluated as being precautionary by ICES before 2015, the management plan will supersede the recommendation set out above.

4) Southern horse mackerel

The Pelagic RAC advises following the MSY approach and setting the TAC for 2014 at 35.000 tons.

5) Boarfish

In relation to boarfish the Pelagic RAC advises following MSY and to set the TAC for 2014 at 127.509 tons accordingly. Furthermore it is recommended that the closures included in the management plan as set out hereunder should be applied. The Pelagic RAC also recommends that the management plan should be updated in light of the ICES advice that now classifies boarfish as a category one stock with a full analytical assesment. The updated plan should then be sent to ICES for evaluation at the next WGWISE meeting in 2014. In addition it is recommended that the boarfish acoustic survey should be included under the Data Collection Framework and the Pelagic RAC notes that this is the third year it has made this recommendation to no avail.

Pelagic RAC boarfish management plan closures:

- A closed season shall operate from 15th March to the 31st August. This is because it is known that herring and mackerel are present in these areas and may be caught with boarfish.
- A closed area shall be implemented inside the Irish 12 mile limit south of 52°30 from 12th February to 31st October, in order to prevent catches of Celtic Sea herring, known to form aggregations at these times.
- If catches of other species covered by TAC, amount to more than 5% of the total catch by day by ICES statistical rectangle, then all fishing must cease in that rectangle for 5 consecutive days.