



**EUROPEAN COMMISSION**  
**DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES**

**THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL**

Brussels,  
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Ms. Verena Ohms  
Executive Secretary  
Pelagic RAC  
Treubstraat 17  
PO Box 72  
2280 AB Rijswijk  
The Netherlands

**Subject: Fishing opportunities 2014: herring stocks, mackerel, blue whiting, horse mackerel and boarfish**

*Yr references: 1314PRAC01; 1314PRAC09; 1314PRAC12*

Dear Ms. Ohms,

Thank you for the Pelagic RAC (PelRAC) recommendations on fishing opportunities 2014 for herring stocks, mackerel, blue whiting, horse mackerel and boarfish. You will find below our reply, especially the follow-up that the Commission intends to give to the points raised. For sake of clarity, we will reply to each recommendation separately.

**Fishing opportunities herring stock 2014 – part 1 (1314PRAC01)**

**1) West of Scotland herring (VIa North)**

The PelRAC recommends a TAC for this stock of 28,067 tonnes, in accordance with the agreed management plan and the Commission's policy statement for 2014. I can confirm that this is indeed the figure included in the Commission's proposal.

The PelRAC further asks the Commission to submit a request to ICES to establish SSB reference points for West of Scotland herring, in advance of the benchmark which is scheduled for 2015. We will discuss this point with ICES as we develop the ICES work programme for 2014 and will inform the RAC in due time of the outcome of these discussions.

**2) Celtic Sea and South of Ireland herring (VIIa South, VIIg,h,j,k)**

The RAC proposes a TAC of 22,360 tonnes, in line with its proposed management plan. Since ICES concluded that this management plan is in accordance with the precautionary approach and leads to sustainable yield, the Commission's proposal also is for a TAC of 22,360 tonnes based on the plan and in line with the Policy Statement.

The RAC further questions why the Commission has asked ICES to provide advice based on MSY for this stock. Asking ICES for MSY advice where this is available is in line with the Commission's policy towards MSY and necessary to assess the evolving state of the stock each year. This does not stand in the way of considering a TAC based on a management plan assessed positively by ICES vis-à-vis the precautionary approach and long-term MSY objectives, as can be seen in the case of several stocks dealt with here.

### **3) Irish Sea herring (VIIa North)**

The Commission welcomes the RAC's commitment to work towards a long term management plan for this stock, and in the meantime bases its proposal on the MSY advice, as is also the recommendation of the RAC.

## **Fishing opportunities mackerel and herring stocks 2014 – part 2 (1314/PRAC09)**

### **1) North Sea autumn spawning herring**

We had an initial exchange of views with Norway on possible changes to the management plan at the meeting in Edinburgh in September. We share the view of the RAC that it would not be appropriate to increase the target F of the management plan, which is currently 0.25, and that the TAC stability mechanism should be changed as described by the RAC. The possibility of including an inter-annual 10% quota flexibility will also be raised with Norway.

### **2) Herring in ICES area Via South and VIIb,c**

My services have been very supportive of the RAC's work on this plan and have sent the text of the revised rebuilding plan to STECF for review (2013 autumn plenary). It will then be decided whether the TAC proposal should be based on the plan or on the MSY advice.

### **3) Western Baltic Spring spawning herring**

The establishment of the EU-Norway technical working group to look at possible TAC setting methods for the mixed herring stocks in the Skagerrak was an important and positive development. The recommendations of that working group will be discussed at the forthcoming consultations with Norway. We fully agree that it is important to arrive at a methodology that will allow the sustainable exploitation of all the component stocks.

### **4) Atlanto-Scandian herring**

We share the views of the RAC on this stock. There is no indication of improved recruitment in recent years, so the stock is likely to continue to decrease in abundance until at least 2017. In these circumstances it is important that all the coastal States agree to respect the catch limits of the management plan.

### **5) Northeast Atlantic Mackerel**

We are also concerned about the re-classification of mackerel as a data limited stock, which means that the TAC advice is now based on the average catches of the last three years, which have been the highest on record, with no forecast of the consequent development of the stock. This makes it all the more important that we reach agreement between the coastal states on sharing arrangements, otherwise the setting of unilateral

quotas will result in total catches that are higher still. The Commission will continue to seek a balanced sharing arrangement for this stock, as it has done since 2011

## **Fishing opportunities blue whiting, horse mackerel and boarfish (1314PRAC12)**

### **1) Blue whiting**

The Coastal States agreed a Long-Term Management Plan in 2008, but in the absence of a stability mechanism (e.g. a TAC constraint of 15%), its implementation has resulted in large fluctuations in TAC levels (540,000 tonnes for 2010, 40,100 tonnes for 2011, 391,000 tonnes for 2012, and 643,000 tonnes for 2013). ICES was subsequently requested to evaluate new harvest control rules and stability mechanisms, including the management model suggested by the RAC.

ICES advised that increasing the fishing mortality rate in the plan to  $F=0.3$  (equivalent to  $F_{msy}$ ) would be precautionary. This is a huge increase from the current target  $F$  of 0.18, and would add to the already large volatility in recent TAC levels. Moreover, ICES did not thoroughly evaluate the model suggested by the PelRAC. The coastal States therefore referred the issue back to ICES for more considered advice in the autumn. This advice has now been delivered and indicated that the RAC management plan would be precautionary, with slightly higher long term yields than the standard HCR, but at the expense of an increase in inter-annual variability.

The results of the ICES evaluations and possible changes to the management plan will be discussed at the next coastal States meeting.

### **2) Western horse mackerel**

We share the RAC's concern about the fact that ICES responding to the EU special request did not give clear advice on how to improve the management plan. As ICES cannot provide such recommendations before the stock will have been benchmarked, my services are working with ICES to schedule this benchmark as soon as possible. Since the plan can no longer be applied in its current form, the Commission's proposal is based on the MSY advice. The Commission acknowledges the effort made by the RAC in proposing an ad hoc transitional solution for next year. However, there are serious concerns arising from the advice regarding the state of the stock and the severe recruitment failure observed over the last 4 years. This has prompted the Commission to propose a more limited TAC for this stock based on MSY.

### **3) North Sea horse mackerel**

We welcome the PelRAC's endeavours to draft a management plan for this stock. The Commission has followed the RAC's recommendation of reducing the TAC by 6,230 tonnes in 2013. In principle, we agree to continue the adjustment, as proposed, with further equal reductions for 2014 and 2015.

### **4) Southern horse mackerel**

The Commission's proposal is in line with the RAC's recommendation, and is based on MSY advice for this stock.

## 5) Boarfish

In 2012, a management plan was submitted by the PelRAC. ICES has not fully evaluated the proposed long-term management plan for boarfish, but identifies that Tier 1 of the proposed plan coincides with the ICES generic approach to giving advice for data-rich situations. Given that a Category 1 assessment is now being used for advice, ICES recommends that Tier 1.1 of the plan be considered consistent with the Precautionary Approach and MSY approaches for as long as a Category 1 assessment is available. Until the plan is fully evaluated, the Commission bases its proposal on MSY advice, which means landings in 2014 of no more than 127,509 tonnes. This is the same figure as would result from the application of the plan proposed by the RAC.

Regarding the inclusion of the boarfish acoustic survey into the Data Collection Framework, it should be noted that the DCF is under revision and we intend to include this survey in a revised DCF.

I would like to invite you to update your plan in light of the ICES evaluation. My services will carefully consider the proposed closures, and examine options of putting them in place, should they be assessed as effective means of management for this stock. Such options could include, among others, regionalised measures.

Thank you for your continuous interest and constructive input. If you have any further question on this reply, you can contact Ms Evangelia Georgitsi, coordinator of the Regional Advisory Councils ([evangelia.georgitsi@ec.europa.eu](mailto:evangelia.georgitsi@ec.europa.eu); +32.2.295.04.43).

Yours sincerely,



Lowri Evans

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