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Date: 7 October 2014
Our reference: 1415/PAC 19
Subject: PELAC stock advice
CC: Evangelia Georgitsi (by email)

Dear Ms Evans,

At its recent Working Group meetings the Pelagic AC discussed the ICES advice for stocks in its remit and formulated a number of recommendations regarding total allowable catches (TACs) as well as other management measures. Subsequently these recommendations were unanimously endorsed by the Executive Committee. I am pleased to draw your attention to the detailed recommendations in Annex I.

Should you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'V. Ohms'.

Verena Ohms
Executive Secretary

Annex I: Recommendation on fishing opportunities for all stocks in the remit of the Pelagic AC

General remark:

In recent years the ICES advice for herring stocks underlines that bottom-disturbing activities should not occur on herring spawning grounds. At the same time, however, ICES does not provide any information on the location of herring spawning grounds therefore making this advice impossible to follow. With increasing competition for ocean space from e.g. the renewable energy sector, tourism and shipping, fishing becomes more and more restricted. In order to optimise the sustainable use of the oceans, pressing issues such as the location of herring spawning grounds must receive priority attention from stakeholders, policy makers and scientists. The Pelagic AC has repeatedly expressed its willingness to collaborate with ICES scientists and help identify the location of herring spawning grounds, but limited funding and manpower have made such collaboration unfeasible. Therefore the Pelagic AC calls upon the Commission to provide guidance for receiving funding in order to carry out the necessary work for mapping herring spawning grounds along the EU coasts.

1) Northeast Atlantic mackerel

Given that the multiannual management plan agreed by the Coastal States in 2008 is only considered precautionary if the TAC constraint in clause 4 of the plan is not applied and given that the management plan does not maximize yield anymore the Pelagic AC advises to follow MSY in 2015 and to revise the existing management plan as soon as possible. Following the MSY approach implies setting the TAC at 1.017 Mio tonnes. If a precautionary multiannual management plan has been agreed in 2016 the Pelagic AC will advise following this plan in 2016. In the absence of a revised management plan following MSY should be continued in 2016. The Pelagic AC would also like to emphasize that the scientific information underlying the stock assessment and in particular the egg survey has to be improved significantly. It was confirmed by the ICES representative that the precision of the egg survey is very low while uncertainty is very high. Therefore the pelagic industry is currently considering carrying out a pre-survey in order to identify the actual start of the mackerel egg production period. Furthermore the Pelagic AC would like to emphasize the need for adequate control and enforcement and that the same measures applying to EU fishermen in European waters must also apply to third country fishermen in European waters.

2) Blue whiting

The Pelagic AC accepts that the existing management plan for blue whiting which has a target F of 0.18 is no longer appropriate and strongly encourages the Commission to seek adoption of a new management plan at the upcoming Coastal States meeting. The Pelagic AC would also like to draw the Commission's attention to the blue whiting management plan developed by the Pelagic AC in 2012. Throughout this process stakeholders from Norway, Iceland and the Faroe Islands were actively involved. As hitherto the Pelagic AC considers its multiannual management plan most appropriate for managing the blue whiting stock.

3) Atlanto-Scandian herring

The Pelagic AC recommends following the multiannual management plan and to set the TAC in 2015 accordingly at 283.013 tonnes. At the same time the Pelagic AC again feels the need to emphasize its deep concern in relation to unilaterally set quotas by the Faroe Islands and that the Commission must continue to seek a return to the international agreement by all parties.

4) Western horse mackerel

In the absence of a precautionary multiannual management plan the Pelagic AC recommends following the MSY approach and setting the TAC in 2015 accordingly at 99.304 tonnes. It also would like to inform the Commission that the process of developing a new management plan is ongoing and the Pelagic AC is confident to finalize its efforts in spring 2015.

5) North Sea autumn spawning herring

The Pelagic AC recommends following the 2014 multiannual management plan and setting overall fishing mortality at $F = 0.26$ as agreed on by the EU and Norway. This would result in a TAC of 445.329 tonnes for the A-fleet. Other elements of this management plan include a $B_{trigger}$ of 1.1 Mio tonnes, an inter-annual flexibility of +/- 10% and a stability mechanism which imposes a 15% constraint on on both fishing mortality (F) and interannual TAC variability (IAV) either above B_{lim} or $B_{trigger}$, i.e. if the preliminary F -value is inside the 15% limits of the FHCN it will be directly applied; if the preliminary F -value is outside the 15% limits of the FHCN it will be brought onto the 15% limits. This TAC constraint should only apply to the A-fleet.

6) Western Baltic spring spawning herring

As in previous years the Pelagic AC would like to emphasize the need for developing a multiannual management plan for this stock and a clear TAC setting procedure rather than advising on a specific TAC number. In this regard the Pelagic AC welcomes the efforts undertaken by the Commission and Norway to establish a TAC setting method taking into account that herring catches in ICES division IIIa consist of several herring stocks. The Pelagic AC also would like to point out that it is heavily involved in the GAP2 herring case study which is dedicated to formulating a management plan for this stock. Results of ongoing research are expected to be available in spring 2015.

7) West of Scotland herring (VIa North)

The Pelagic AC recommends following the multiannual management plan implying a TAC of 22.690 tonnes in 2015. Furthermore it is strongly advised that missing reference points will be addressed and completed at the latest at the benchmark in 2015.

8) VIa South and VIIb,c herring

Over the past years the Pelagic AC has spent significant resources on developing a rebuilding plan for this stock. However, STECF has concluded that this plan is only capable of rebuilding the stock if transboundary catches are eliminated. As the issue of transboundary catches has to be addressed prior to giving a TAC recommendation the

Pelagic AC has decided to await the benchmark in 2015 before providing any further recommendations.

9) Celtic Sea and South of Ireland herring

The Pelagic AC advises following the multiannual management plan and to set the TAC in 2015 at 15.652 tonnes. Clarification from the Commission is requested regarding the reason behind asking ICES to base its advice on MSY even though a multiannual management plan is available that has been found precautionary by ICES.

10) Irish Sea herring

Efforts by the Pelagic AC of developing a multiannual management plan for this stock are currently ongoing, but have not been finalized yet. In the absence of a multiannual management plan it is recommended following MSY and setting the TAC at 4.854 tonnes in 2015.

11) North Sea horse mackerel

In light of the latest ICES advice the Pelagic AC is not in a position to recommend a specific TAC number. Instead it is strongly recommended that the knowledge base for this stock must be greatly improved. To this end the Pelagic AC will initiate a data collection and analysis strategy for this stock. The strategy will focus on four actions under two main headers that derive from the recommendations of the multiannual management plan evaluation:

1. Stock boundaries and mixing
 - a. Utilizing (past) catch records of pelagic freezer-trawlers to derive detailed length compositions and fish conditions of catches in VIIId and adjacent areas.
 - b. Active engagement of the fishing industry in sample collection for GCxGC-MS (Gas chromatography x Gas chromatography-mass spectrometry) and genetic analysis. Carrying out analyses of the samples collected.
2. Stock indicators
 - a. Utilizing (past) catch records of pelagic freezer-trawlers to derive an index of abundance based on search time.
 - b. Exploring the potential coupling of the French 3rd quarter CGFS survey in VIIId with the 3rd quarter IBTS survey in the North Sea.

The North Sea horse mackerel knowledge strategy will be carried out during the fishery in 2014 and 2015 and is expected to yield preliminary results prior to the next ICES WGWISE meeting (September 2015).

12) Southern horse mackerel

The Pelagic AC recommends following the MSY approach and setting the TAC in 2015 at 71.824 tonnes. Efforts to formulate a multiannual management plan for this stock are

ongoing and a first meeting with Spanish and Portuguese stakeholders and scientists is planned in October 2015.

13) Northeast Atlantic Boarfish

Given the regrettable situation that boarfish is now considered a data-limited stock the Pelagic AC recommends following the ICES data-limited stocks approach and setting the TAC at 53.296 tonnes in 2015. In addition it strongly emphasizes the need for covering this stock under the Data Collection Framework and continuation of the acoustic survey. The multiannual management plan developed by the Pelagic AC and only partially evaluated by ICES must also be revisited.