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Date: 13 April 2015  
Our reference: 1415/PAC 78  
Subject: Clarification on blue whiting F<sub>msy</sub>

Dear Ms Evans,

In recent years it has become obvious that the blue whiting management plan adopted in 2008 by the Coastal States is no longer appropriate due to outdated scientific calculations and a shift in the blue whiting recruitment regime (ICES 2014<sup>1</sup>). While the Coastal States have not followed this management plan for a number of years, none of the parties has formally rejected the plan. Therefore the 2008 management plan, though precautionary, inappropriately dominates the ICES advice. In addition, in 2013 NEAFC has sent a special request to ICES asking, among other things, for re-evaluation of biomass and fishing mortality reference points. In its response ICES confirmed that B<sub>lim</sub> and B<sub>pa</sub> should remain unchanged at 1.50 and 2.25 million tonnes respectively. F<sub>pa</sub> and F<sub>lim</sub> were previously undefined, but have been calculated using equilibrium stochastic simulations resulting in F<sub>lim</sub> = 0.48 and F<sub>pa</sub> = 0.32. In addition the F<sub>msy</sub> value for which previously only a proxy had been available was calculated to be 0.30. ICES also pointed out that MSY B<sub>trigger</sub> corresponded to B<sub>pa</sub> and hence equaled 2.25 million tonnes (ICES 2013a<sup>2</sup>). Despite the clear response by ICES which did not leave room for doubts or interpretation the Coastal States, and to our knowledge especially the Commission, seriously questioned the F<sub>msy</sub> value calculated by ICES and sent a follow-up request asking for confirmation of the precautionary and MSY

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<sup>1</sup> ICES (2014a): ICES Advice 2014, book 9, Widely distributed and migratory stocks, Blue whiting in Subareas I-IX, XII, XIV. <http://www.ices.dk/sites/pub/Publication%20Reports/Advice/2014/2014/whb-comb.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> ICES (2013a): NEAFC request to ICES to evaluate the harvest control rule element of the long-term management plan for blue whiting. <http://www.ices.dk/sites/pub/Publication%20Reports/Advice/2013/Special%20requests/NEAFC%20blue%20whiting%20HCR%20element%20evaluation.pdf>

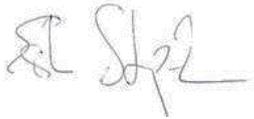
reference points. Again, ICES clearly explained that the  $F_{msy} = 0.3$  value it had calculated previously is valid (ICES 2013b<sup>3</sup>).

In 2012 the Pelagic AC developed a comprehensive management plan for blue whiting. In 2013 ICES evaluated the plan and found it precautionary. The Pelagic AC is in the process of adjusting values within the proposed plan, aligning it with the latest ICES advice. In this process the Pelagic AC would like to receive clarification from the Commission on which grounds it is continuously questioning the independent ICES advice and the  $F_{msy}$  values repeatedly presented. The Pelagic AC has a long tradition for developing science based consensus advice aiming for managing fish stocks at MSY. Undermining the advice from ICES greatly weakens the ACs ability to interact with clients, stakeholders and the scientific community and continue to provide comprehensive advice on fisheries management.

Furthermore we would like to call upon the Commission to pave the way for adoption of a new management plan as soon as possible after consultation with the Pelagic AC.

We are looking forward to receiving your detailed response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Esben Sverdrup-Jensen'.

Esben Sverdrup-Jensen  
Chairman Working Group I

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<sup>3</sup> ICES (2013b): NEAFC request to ICES to evaluate the extra harvest control rule options for the long-term management plan for blue whiting.

<http://www.ices.dk/sites/pub/Publication%20Reports/Advice/2013/Special%20requests/NEAFC%20blue%20whiting%20extra%20HCR%20element%20evaluation.pdf>