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Date: 14 October 2015
Our reference: 1516/PAC 10
Subject: Fishing opportunities 2016

Dear Mr Aguiar Machado,

At its recent Working Group meetings the Pelagic AC discussed the ICES advice for stocks in its remit and formulated a number of recommendations in relation to total allowable catches (TACs) as well as other management measures. These recommendations were subsequently unanimously approved by the Executive Committee and I have the pleasure to present the details below in annex I.

In case you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact the Pelagic AC Secretariat.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Ian Gatt' with a small flourish at the end.

Ian Gatt
Chairman Pelagic AC

Annex I: Recommendations on fishing opportunities in 2016 for all stocks in the remit of the Pelagic AC

General:

To establish a sustainable policy in respect of the new CFP and tailored to the circumstances of pelagic fisheries requires in-depth knowledge of stock biology, ecosystem functioning and structure and performance of fisheries. The knowledge provided must suit the need of the Pelagic AC to make relevant choices regarding stock utilization, ecosystem considerations and discard ban implementation. Several knowledge gaps and other scientific issues have been identified (see below) that hinder effective management of specific pelagic stocks, e.g. lack of genetic data to separate samples and catches of herring in ICES area VIa North and VIa South, VIIb,c, uncertain assessment of Northeast Atlantic mackerel etc. While members of the Pelagic AC have expressed their commitment to contribute to data collection for several stocks, e.g. herring in area VIa North and VIa South, North Sea horse mackerel, western horse mackerel and Northeast Atlantic mackerel the Pelagic AC would like to call upon the Commission to actively support the Pelagic AC's efforts by taking such research needs into account when formulating requests to ICES.

Blue whiting

The Pelagic AC strongly encourages Coastal States to agree on a multiannual management strategy for the blue whiting stock. The current situation of no international agreement in combination with a highly uncertain assessment leading to significant fluctuations in yearly TAC advice by ICES is unsatisfactory for successfully managing the stock.

The Pelagic AC further encourages Coastal States to explore the original management strategy developed by the Pelagic AC and endorsed by ICES.

Atlanto-Scandian herring

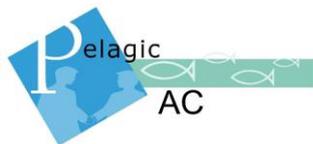
The Pelagic AC recommends following the existing management plan and to set the TAC at 316.876 tonnes accordingly. Furthermore article 20a of Council Regulation 850/1998 prohibiting catches of herring in Union waters of ICES area IIa during the larger part of the year should be deleted or otherwise derogated from.

North Sea autumn spawning herring

The Pelagic AC recommends following the EU-Norway managing plan implying a TAC of 555.086 tonnes in 2016, including 518.242 tonnes for the A-fleet. At the same time the Pelagic AC would like to emphasize the importance of consulting all relevant stakeholders and the scientific community when developing a management plan or strategy.

Western Baltic spring spawning herring

It is recommended to follow the ICES MSY approach for this stock and to set the TAC at 52.547 tonnes accordingly.



North Sea horse mackerel

The Pelagic AC supports the ICES advice and recommends setting the TAC at 15.200 tonnes. Furthermore ongoing research carried out by members of the Pelagic AC in collaboration with IMARES on stock identification and developing abundance indices is being supported.

Northeast Atlantic mackerel

As a matter of urgency the Pelagic AC strongly encourages Coastal States to adopt a long-term management strategy for this stock. Furthermore, the Pelagic AC, through its industry partners, is fully committed to support the international egg survey in 2016 and to fill the void created by Norway's decision not to participate in the upcoming egg survey. A number of technical issues must also be pursued. This includes the unstable assessment which ICES considers a source of major concern and which might be tightly related to the IESSNS survey. Density dependent growth is another issue that requires more attention by the scientific community. A workshop hold in Bergen, Norway on 13-14 August 2015 addressing density dependent growth in mackerel and possible implications for management strategy evaluations is considered a step in the right direction. Another promising avenue leading to a better assessment of the Northeast Atlantic mackerel stock is radio-frequency identification (RFID) tagging currently carried out by Norway. The EU pelagic industry participates in this project through tag reading equipment fitted in pelagic processing factories.

Western horse mackerel

Given the current lack of a precautionary management strategy for this stock the Pelagic AC recommends following the ICES MSY advice and to set the TAC at 126.013 tonnes. Over the next year, however, the Pelagic AC will increase its efforts to finalize a management strategy. In addition the Pelagic AC will support the international egg survey in 2016 and continue to explore additional data sources.

Southern horse mackerel

The Pelagic AC recommends following the ICES MSY approach in 2016 and setting the TAC at 68.583 tonnes accordingly. Efforts to develop a management strategy should be continued.

Boarfish

The Pelagic AC recommends following the ICES advice and setting the TAC at 42.637 tonnes in 2016. It is further requested that the Commission will take on-board the revised management strategy submitted by the Pelagic AC and that the closed areas will be incorporated in the TAC and quota regulation. It will also be necessary to continue developing an assessment for this stock.

Herring in ICES area VIa and VIIb,c

The Pelagic AC recommends that a rebuilding plan for these stocks is developed as soon as possible which will contain a number of measures ultimately aiming to provide separate stock assessments again. Next Generation Sequencing (NGS) based approaches should be used to develop a genetic stock identification tool enabling rapid and cost-effective splitting of survey samples and catches of

herring in VIa North and VIa South, VIIb,c into stock of origin. Furthermore, acoustic mini-surveys carried out by the fishing industry should be used to further improve the knowledge base of these stocks. A larval and genetic study proposed by the Marine Institute in Bergen to the Norwegian Research Council might also provide valuable recruitment information, if funded. This project aims at identifying and assessing complex population structure in herring stocks in the North Sea and adjacent areas. The results of this study should hence be taken into account. To carry out the research listed above it will be necessary to establish a monitoring TAC, similar to what has been proposed for sandeel¹. Finally, parties should prepare for the next benchmark to be carried out in 2017.

The Pelagic AC understands that there is EMFF funding available to support scientific projects such as genetic sequencing alluded to above. Given the urgency of the work stream the Pelagic AC would highly appreciate if the Commission could provide the information required to draw EMFF funding for this project.

Celtic Sea herring

The Pelagic AC recommends revising the TAC in 2015 to 21.404 tonnes and to set the TAC in 2016 at 17.228 tonnes.

Irish Sea herring

The Pelagic AC recommends following the ICES MSY advice and to set the TAC in 2016 at 4.573 tonnes accordingly. Furthermore, it is recommended that a management strategy for this stock will be developed.

¹ <http://www.ices.dk/sites/pub/Publication%20Reports/Advice/2015/2015/san-ns4.pdf>