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Date: 19 April 2016  
Our reference: 1516/PAC 71  
Subject: Proposed amendments to the discard plan for the North Western Waters

Dear Mr Gueudar-Delahaye,

After having dealt with the landing obligation for pelagic fisheries for more than a year the Pelagic AC has identified a number of issues that it believes should be addressed by the North Western Waters Group to further enable the implementation of the landing obligation in such a way that unnecessary costs can be avoided while at the same time adding value to unwanted catches. The Pelagic AC would therefore like to kindly ask the North Western Waters Group to consider the following issues when amending the discard plan for the North Western Waters:

*1) Processing plant on-board pelagic vessels*

The Pelagic AC recommends that the possibility to install processing plants on-board pelagic vessels should be granted as long as the following two conditions are being met: firstly, full documentation of the catch entering the processing plant must be guaranteed to ensure that no endangered, threatened or protected species will end up in the processing plant. Secondly, the same quality and regulatory requirements that apply to fish processing plants onshore should apply to fish processing plants on-board.

*2) Abolishment of catch composition rules*

Under the landing obligation catch composition rules in pelagic fisheries, e.g. the so-called "mackerel box" are no longer relevant and should therefore be abolished.

*3) Survivability exemptions in purse-seine fisheries*

The Pelagic AC strongly recommends that survivability exemptions in purse-seine fisheries are being implemented in the same way in all areas. This requires coordination among the Scheveningen group, the NWW group and the SWW group. While in the North Sea it is mandatory to attach a buoy to the purse-seine, this is not a requirement in other areas. The Pelagic AC recommends that this rule, and potentially other rules, are being aligned.



#### 4) *Bycatch of hake*

Bycatch of hake in North Western Waters turned out to be a problem in pelagic fisheries, especially in the horse mackerel fishery, due to the large abundance of the hake stock, but the small amount of quota, hence leading to a serious choke problem. There are several possibilities to mitigate this issue. On the one hand a *de minimis* exemption could be granted for bycatch of hake in pelagic fisheries. On the other hand hake could be included in footnote 3 of the TAC and Quota Regulation which states that: *“Without prejudice to the landing obligation, catches of boarfish, whiting and mackerel may be counted against up to 5 % of the quota (OTH/\*2A-14), provided that not more than 9 % in total of this quota for horse mackerel is accounted for by these catches and by-catches of those species that are accounted for under Article 15(8) of Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013.”* A third option regards quota swaps among Member States. The Pelagic AC recommends that Member States consider all options listed as potential solutions to the problem of hake bycatch.

I hope that you find the above listed recommendations helpful when amending the discard plan for the North Western Waters. A further recommendation on the handling of damaged fish might be sent in the near future, but at this point is still subject to agreement by the Executive Committee.

In case you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact the secretariat.

Yours sincerely,

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

Ian Gatt  
Chairman Pelagic AC