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Subject: Fishing opportunities 2017

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 adopted 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 me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light grey rectangular background.

Verena Ohms  
Executive Secretary Pelagic AC



## **Annex I: Recommendations on fishing opportunities in 2017 for all stocks in the remit of the Pelagic AC**

### **General:**

To establish sustainable management in respect of the 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 implementation of the landing obligation. Various knowledge gaps and other scientific issues have been identified that hinder effective management of specific pelagic stocks, e.g. the impossibility to separate samples and catches of herring in ICES area 6.a North and 6.a South, 7.b,c as well as the generally weak knowledge base for Western and North Sea horse mackerel. Members of the Pelagic AC are actively pursuing efforts to improve the knowledge base for those and other stocks by carrying out industry acoustic surveys and genetic analyses. The Pelagic AC would like to call upon the Commission to strongly support the Pelagic AC's effort by taking such research needs into account when formulating requests to ICES and in drawing up the Commission's own work program.

ACs play an important role in achieving sustainable management of fishing activities and in securing the implementation of the CFP objectives in close dialogue with all relevant stakeholders. It is key for the functioning of the Pelagic AC and for the commitment of its members that the work and recommendations produced are weighed in and reflected on by the Commission and the Member States.

### **Blue whiting**

The Pelagic AC recommends following the ICES MSY advice and setting the TAC at 1 342 330 tonnes in 2017.

Furthermore it is recommended that the stabilizing measure proposed in the NEAFC multiannual management strategy, recently evaluated by ICES, will be explored further. The asymmetrical 20% TAC change limit can lead to a significant decrease in TAC when the stock falls below  $B_{pa}$  while at the same time limits TAC increases substantially once the stock has recovered to above  $B_{pa}$ . Therefore, the Pelagic AC recommends exploring a scenario where the TAC change limit will not apply in the year the stock is estimated to have recovered to above  $B_{pa}$ , but will apply again in subsequent years. Given that the simulation framework already exists it should require little effort by ICES to evaluate the scenario described above.

The Pelagic AC further encourages Coastal States to explore the two tier approach to fishing mortality as originally suggested in the multiannual management strategy developed by the Pelagic AC in 2012. The Pelagic AC believes that working with different fishing mortality values at different SSB levels could be a key tool in securing long-term stability without sacrificing yield.

### **Atlanto-Scandian herring**

The Pelagic AC recommends following the existing long-term management plan and to set the TAC at 646 075 tonnes accordingly in 2017.

In addition the Pelagic AC will await the re-evaluation of reference points and of the long-term management plan scheduled to take place in autumn 2016 after which further recommendations might be submitted.

While the ICES assessment does not include data on discards since they are considered negligible the Pelagic AC will nevertheless pursue to gather data on potential discards.

### **North Sea autumn spawning herring**

The Pelagic AC recommends that the EU-Norway management strategy will be revised in view of the new ICES advice and revised  $F_{msy}$  reference point. Such a revision must be done as quickly as possible and before the December Council meeting so that the TAC for 2017 can be set based on a revised management strategy in accordance with the latest scientific advice.

### **Western Baltic spring spawning herring**

The Pelagic AC recommends to follow the management strategy agreed by the EU and Norway, but to revise the TAC setting mechanism taking into account the revision of the EU-Norway management strategy for North Sea autumn spawning herring as recommended by the Pelagic AC.

### **North Sea horse mackerel**

The Pelagic AC recommends that the TAC is set at 15 200 tonnes in 2017. This figure is lower than the ICES catch advice which includes an additional 3 047 tonnes based on discard estimates from the demersal sector which has not yet come under the landing obligation. The Pelagic AC considers that the ICES catch advice could lead to political discussions in the Council resulting in an increased fishing mortality in the directed fishery which under sustainability considerations must be avoided.

The unexpected high discard rate of 16.7% causes concern amongst members of the Pelagic AC. Therefore it is further recommended that the discard data from the demersal fishery will be thoroughly analysed before the benchmark takes place.

### **Northeast Atlantic mackerel**

The Pelagic AC recommends that the management strategy proposed by the EU, Norway and the Faroe Islands will be submitted for evaluation to STECF as soon as possible. If STECF deems the management strategy precautionary and in line with the CFP before the Council meeting on 12 December 2016, then the Pelagic AC recommends that the management strategy will be followed and that the TAC in 2017 will be set accordingly at 1 020 996 tonnes. If the management strategy is not deemed precautionary by STECF, the Pelagic AC recommends that the ICES MSY approach will be followed and that the TAC will be set at 944 302 tonnes in 2017.

In addition the Pelagic AC recommends that a number of technical issues will be addressed at the upcoming benchmark including the contradictory signals provided by the egg survey versus the IESSNS survey, the collection of RFI tagging data and the issue of density dependent growth.

### **Western horse mackerel**

The Pelagic AC recommends to follow the ICES MSY advice and to set the TAC for this stock at 69 186 tonnes in 2017.

Enormous efforts are being undertaken by the Pelagic AC in collaboration with the fishing industry and national research institutes to explore additional data sources that could inform the Western horse mackerel assessment, including, but not limited to, the use of groundfish surveys to develop a juvenile index, genetic stock ID analyses and the development of abundance indicators from vessel catch records. Information derived from these efforts should be considered at the upcoming benchmark.

Furthermore there are indications from skippers that stronger year classes are entering the stock which need to be protected. Therefore, a seasonal closure from April until September in the West of Ireland should be explored in the coming months.

Finally, it is recommended that the assessment for 2017 will be updated once the benchmark in early 2017 has been concluded.

### **Southern horse mackerel**

The Pelagic AC recommends that the ICES MSY approach is being followed and that the TAC will be set at 73 349 tonnes accordingly in 2017.

Moreover, ongoing efforts on developing a multiannual management strategy for this stock must continue and if such a strategy is available by the time the benchmark takes place in 2017 it should be evaluated at the benchmark.

### **Boarfish**

The Pelagic AC recommends that the precautionary approach is followed and that the TAC in 2017 will be set at 27 288 tonnes accordingly.

In addition the Pelagic AC strongly urges the Commission to explore possibilities to implement the closures included in the management strategy developed by the Pelagic AC. Unfortunately the North Western Waters (NWW) regional group refused the Pelagic AC's request to implement these closures through the NWW pelagic discard plan and we call upon the Commission to facilitate discussions with the NWW group in this and other regards.

Furthermore the acoustic survey does not cover the entire stock and the timing of some ground fish surveys in the Celtic Sea and Bay of Biscay creates potential problems for the assessment and these should be addressed. Efforts should continue to move from a category 3 assessment to a category 1 assessment.

### **Herring in ICES area 6.a and 7.b,c**

The Pelagic AC recommends that STECF will be requested as soon as possible to provide advice on a monitoring TAC for these stocks. Such advice must be provided before the Council meeting on 12 December 2016. Having a monitoring TAC in 2017 is essential to continue the industry acoustic surveys which, in combination with the genetic stock separation study, form the basis for a rebuilding plan.

Furthermore, the Pelagic AC will actively engage with the Norwegian institute of marine research on a larval and genetic study if the proposal will receive funding.

The Pelagic AC also requests that a benchmark will be carried out at the earliest opportunity during 2017 aiming at providing separate stock assessments again.

### **Celtic Sea herring**

The Pelagic AC recommends following the management strategy it has developed previously and to set the TAC at 14 467 tonnes in 2017.

Moreover, the Pelagic AC greatly encourages the Commission to ask ICES to use the management strategy as top line for the ICES advice in 2018.

In addition, the Pelagic AC would like to express its concern in relation to the acoustic survey. Data from the survey in 2014 and 2015 have not been included in the assessment given that the survey did not cover the stock. This will lead to a more vulnerable assessment in 2017 and it must be ensured that the next survey will be carried out successfully and can be included in the assessment.

### **Irish Sea herring**

The Pelagic AC recommends following the ICES MSY approach and to set the TAC in 2017 at 4.172 tonnes accordingly. Furthermore, efforts to develop a multiannual management strategy for this stock must continue.