



Ms. Maja Kirchner

Head of Unit
Fisheries Management Atlantic, Skagerrak and Baltic Sea
Directorate General Maritime Affairs & Fisheries
Rue de la Loi 200
1049 Brussels
BELGIUM

Pelagic AC
Louis Braillelaan 80
2719 EK Zoetermeer
The Netherlands

Tel: +31 (0)63 375 6324
E-mail: info@pelagic-ac.org
<http://www.pelagic-ac.org>

Date: 06 December 2021
Our reference: 2122PAC15
Subject: 2022 TAC advice Southern horse mackerel

Dear Ms. Maja Kirchner,

We are writing to you following-up on the meeting held between DG Mare and the Pelagic AC and SWWAC Secretariats on 25 November 2021 as well as the joint PelAC and SWWAC Focus Group held on December 2nd. During these meetings, the Pelagic AC clarified the basis of its 2022 advice as regards the Southern horse mackerel stock. The background to arrive at our position can be summarised as follows:

Since 2014, the Pelagic AC has been working on developing a long-term management strategy (LTMS) for Southern horse mackerel, which was finalised and deemed precautionary by ICES in 2018. Since the strategy became applicable, a significant difference in advice in allowed catches emerged between the ICES MSY advice for Southern horse mackerel and the corresponding ICES advice following the management strategy. This led to issues with affected industry stakeholders, which included members of the SWWAC, that were dissatisfied with this perceived imbalance. A series of Focus Groups were subsequently held involving both PelAC and SWWAC interested stakeholders as well as scientists, to discuss possibilities for adapting the LTMS. Consensus between all stakeholders was reached in May 2021 with the decision to amend the established target year to reach F_{msy} within the strategy – the year 2025 – to a target year of 2022, as this would bring the strategy more swiftly in line with the ICES MSY advice. This amendment was subsequently communicated to the Commission for review by ICES, together with our request to follow the management plan as the top-line advice from ICES, subject to this review.

To our great surprise, during the July 2021 Working Group II meeting ICES informed the PelAC of a recent decision taken by ACOM to change the F_{msy} reference point for this stock (from 0.11 to 0.15), thus bringing the plan out of alignment with the MSY advice once more. The timing of this decision was highly unfortunate and undermined our consensus seeking efforts. Moreover, members found that the scientific rationale for this decision was missing, and

concerns were raised over the robustness of this decision leading to a significant year-to-year catch increase, considering the lack of 2020-2021 survey data.

Efforts were undertaken to seek agreement on a TAC advice for 2022 between all stakeholders prior to the PelAC October meetings. It was agreed that another joint-PelAC/SWWAC Focus Group meeting would be organized in the short term to determine what amendments to the plan would be necessary to bring it back into alignment with the new MSY advice. When this meeting was held on December 2nd, it became clear from the involved stock assessor that any changes to align the plan with the revised F_{msy} value would require conducting a full Management Strategy Evaluation. Furthermore, an update from the WGHANSA meeting in November was provided, where serious concerns over the lack of survey data were voiced by the involved scientists, in addition to a number of other issues related to the data sources. WGHANSA concluded that the resulting assessment uncertainty is serious to a degree that an ICES (inter)benchmark meeting will be called for this stock in the near future.

The Pelagic AC aims to stay true to its objectives and will continue to support management strategies it has contributed to developing. However, in light of the above unforeseen series of circumstances in the science, it is not possible for the PelAC to put forward a revised management strategy, as anticipated in its 2022 TAC recommendation for this stock. It follows that the PelAC cannot recommend a TAC figure for 2022, until an ICES (inter)benchmark provides a more robust assessment and clarity on the final reference points. The Pelagic AC asks the Commission to help expedite the organization of this benchmark meeting as a matter of urgency.

For any further questions on this dossier, please do not hesitate to contact the Secretariat.

Yours sincerely,



Jesper Raakjaer
Pelagic AC Chairman