



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR FISHERIES AND MARITIME AFFAIRS

Director-General

Brussels, 15.03.2007
D(2007) *2973

Ingvild Harkes
Pelagic RAC
Treubstraat 17
PO Box 72
2280 AB Rijswijk
The Netherlands

Subject: RAC Advice of 22 February

Dear Ms. Harkes

You have sent me four letters on various topics, and I will endeavour to respond on all four topics in the same reply.

Immediate removal of the Butt of Lewis Box

As I mentioned in my previous letter concerning the management of herring to the West of Scotland, it is my intention that the matter of the removal of this closure should be dealt with in the context of the general review of technical measures for fisheries in North-East Atlantic waters. A proposal will be made by the Commission in the fourth quarter of 2007 after relevant scientific groups have been convened to examine the issue.

Follow-up on blue whiting

I take note of your request to implement ICES recommendations concerning fisheries that catch important amounts of juvenile blue whiting. I agree that a follow-up of this topic is important (as always, the implementation of scientific advice is a priority). This should however best be done in the context of the Coastal State negotiations concerning blue whiting. The Commission will consult Member States on this topic before bringing this matter to the attention of the other states with whom we share management of the stock.

You raise five additional research questions concerning blue whiting. I think it is necessary to discuss these questions first with other Coastal States. It would be much preferable to prepare a joint request for scientific advice, especially as relatively little research is done by Community scientists on blue whiting within ICES. Therefore, I will ask my services to make sure that these issues also are prepared for discussion at the next Coastal States discussions.

As you are aware, ICES stock assessments for blue whiting were originally calculated for separate northern and southern stocks. Because of difficulties in discriminating catch and survey data from different stocks, it was found impractical to continue separate assessments of stocks in the two areas. I can agree that the issue could be investigated again by ICES, but as for the other questions this issue should be treated in the context of the Coastal States discussions.

Concerning the timing of the advice, I would like to remind you that we expect to move to a new work calendar whereby most scientific advice should be available in June. This will allow for more time for substantive consultations. However, this arrangement will not yet be in place in 2007, and we shall have to live with the present arrangements for a little while longer.

Mackerel management

You are correct to note that the Commission has asked ICES to begin work on the evaluation of alternative management plans for mackerel. I understand that under their new working procedures an important early step in the process will be to convene a meeting of scientists, industry and managers in order to have an early discussion about feasible and workable options. I expect therefore that you will shortly receive an invitation from ICES to attend such a meeting, and you will be able to put directly to ICES your views concerning a constant TAC. I urge you to participate in this dialogue, which should be a useful and fruitful new process.

Advice concerning herring

I can agree to forward your letter to ICES for their consideration in respect of options for further reductions in North Sea herring TACs (your paragraph 1). However, your paragraphs 2 to 4 concern the calculation of precautionary reference points, an issue which falls clearly under the responsibility of ICES. I will therefore forward your letter to ICES, while making it clear that paragraph 1 constitutes a formal request from the Commission at the request of the RAC, but paragraphs 2 to 4 are questions raised by the RAC concerning an issue on which ICES is the deciding body. We are, however, aware that ICES has specifically included a review of the reference points for North Sea herring in its workplan for 2007.

Thank you for maintaining a close dialogue with the European Commission and with ICES. The quality of the work of the Pelagic RAC is always impressive, and I am pleased that our dialogue continues to improve.

Yours sincerely

Fokion Fotiadis
(signed)