

EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR FISHERIES AND MARITIME AFFAIRS

Director-General

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Brussels,
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Mr Ian MacSween
Pelagic RAC
Treubstraat 17
PO Box 72
2280 AB Rijswijk
Nederland

Subject: Pelagic RAC recommendations on TACs for 2008

Dear Mr Ian MacSween,

Thank you for sending me the Pelagic RAC's advice concerning TACs and other issues relating to pelagic stocks.

I am sorry to hear that you are still concerned at the presentation of RAC advice to the Commission in the context of pelagic stocks. There is of course only a very short time between the final presentation of ICES advice for these stocks and the decisions taken in the Coastal States meetings concerning mackerel, Atlanto-Scandian herring and blue whiting. However, the head of the Community's delegation to those meetings met representatives of the Pelagic RAC on several occasions in order to hear the concerns of your sector. Within short time available, our delegation has made every practical effort possible to hear the concerns of the pelagic sector. For 2008, ICES will still provide its advice for mackerel, Atlanto-Scandian herring and blue whiting at its October ACFM session so a significant change in the timing of the Coastal States negotiations will not be possible. For 2009 however, we expect the ICES advice to be made available in the spring so that the decision-making calendar could be brought forward. More time will then be available to hear the advice of the Pelagic RAC.

Concerning the stocks where decisions have been taken jointly with other Coastal States, I will discuss the state of play concerning the issues you raise. Concerning stocks managed exclusively by the Community, the Commission has based its proposal on the application of the rules in the "Policy Statements" for 2006 and 2007.

Atlanto-Scandian herring

The TAC was set at 1 518 000t, reflecting the high productivity of this stock when fished at a low fishing mortality rate. The existing management plan does not include a restraint on TAC fluctuations within 15%, nor did the Coastal States agree on the inclusion of such a limit in the management plan. However, an inter-annual flexibility of +/- 10% was agreed.

Northeast Atlantic Mackerel

You will be aware that the other Coastal States could not cooperate with the Community's initiatives to improve the long-term management of mackerel based on new advice from ICES.

Herring in VIa(N)

The Commission has been preparing a proposal for a Regulation concerning the long-term management of this stock based on previous RAC advice. As that proposal is well advanced, the new opinion of the RAC could only be taken into account by the Council with the agreement of the Commission after the proposal has been formally adopted.

Horse mackerel (all areas)

I would like to congratulate the Pelagic RAC in supporting the development of an innovative approach to long-term management for the Western horse mackerel. This has been an important step forward. I look forward to reading of the further work of the horse mackerel focus group.

The Commission's intention is to implement the Policy Statement rules according to the ICES advice and adapting the ICES advice to the existing management areas defined in the annual fishing opportunities regulation.

The advice from ICES is as follows:

North Sea stock (in IVbc, VIId and the eastern part of IIIa) : 18 000t, compared to a catch of 36 000t in the same area in 2006. According to the Policy Statement, this decrease should be limited to a maximum 15% reduction = **30 600t**.

Western stock (in IIa, IVa, Vb, VIa, VIIa-c,e-k, VIIIa-e) : 180 000t compared with a catch of 155 000t in the same area. According to the Policy Statement, this increase should be limited to a maximum 15% increase = **178 250t**

Southern stock (in VIIIc and IXa) : 25 000t. This is within a 15% change from the catch level in 2006 of 24000t, so the figure applied for this area = **25 000t**.

The total catch proposed by the Commission for all areas is therefore $30\,600 + 178\,250 + 25\,000\text{t} = \mathbf{233\,850\text{t}}$. This figure is 0.374% smaller than the total TACs established for the North Sea, Western, and Southern areas for 2007. As it is not possible to match the TAC areas directly to the corresponding ICES advisory areas, the Commission proposes a reduction in all three TACs by the same small proportion so that the total of the TACs matches the total of the ICES advice as amended by the Policy Statement rules. It is not correct to conclude that the Commission rejects the advice on the catch increase for the Western stock.

The Commission will consider further work on horse mackerel management in 2008, including a future Community management plan and the adaptation of management areas. As no long-term management plan is in place, the Commission will not consider TAC levels beyond 2008 at this stage.

Blue whiting


The Coastal states agreed to establish an expert group to examine long-term management issues in 2008. The Pelagic RAC's non-TAC recommendations could be considered in that context.

North Sea herring

You will be aware that agreement was reached with Norway on a 41% decrease in the TAC for 2007. While the Community supported the view of the Pelagic RAC, Norway did not and a compromise had to be reached on this point (as on many others).

I am aware this outcome is a disappointment to the Pelagic RAC. In my view, it highlights the need for the pelagic RAC to be actively involved at the stage of defining and agreeing long-term plans. Interventions by the sector concerning specific TAC decisions at a late stage in the process are inevitably less productive than an early engagement concerning long-term management. The review of the management plan for herring in 2008 will be an occasion for further contributions and discussions on this topic.

Yours sincerely,



Fokion Fotiadis