



EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL

Brussels, 22 NOV. 2012  
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**Pelagic RAC**  
Ms Ohms  
Treubstraat 17  
POBox 72  
NL-2280  
AB Rijswijk  
The Netherlands

**Subject: Advice from the Pelagic RAC on the Northeast Atlantic mackerel and Atlanto-Scandian herring**

*Yr reference: Letter from V. Ohms dated 15 October (1213PRAC08)*

Dear Ms Ohms,

Thank you for the advice from the Pelagic RAC on North East Atlantic mackerel and Atlanto-Scandian herring. You will find below the response to your advice. For the sake of clarity, I will follow the structure of your advice.

North East Atlantic Mackerel

The Commission shares your concern about the continued lack of agreement between the coastal states on sharing arrangements for this stock. The exploitation rates that we have witnessed in the two most recent years are unsustainable, and will lead to the depletion of the stock. This would be in no-one's interest. I can assure you that the Commission will continue to press for a fair and reasonable solution that is acceptable to all of the coastal states.

I also agree that we must aim for scientific assessments of this stock that are of the highest possible quality. As you rightly say, this is dependent on good quality catch data from the fishery as well as fishery independent survey data. You will be aware that the coastal states have agreed on a joint request to ICES to address this issue, which reads as follows:

*The Coastal States refer to the ICES advice on Northeast Atlantic mackerel for 2013 where it states that "Unreported catches in the time-series cause underestimation of stock size in the analytical assessment, which is the basis of the scientific advice. The level of misreporting may have changed over time. This will remain a problem for future years, as the model cannot compensate for an*

*unknown level of historical unreported catches.” (ICES Advice 2012, Book 9, pg. 9).*

*Based on this*

- 1. ICES is requested to explore and evaluate the sensitivity of the current assessment to past uncertainties in the estimates of removals.*
- 2. In anticipation of the 2014 benchmark assessment, ICES is further requested to advise on the utility of existing surveys for other stocks to derive tuning indices for the mackerel assessment, or how existing mackerel survey should be extended or improved. Furthermore, ICES is asked to advise on the need for other fisheries-independent indices with the aim to improve the assessment.*

You also refer to the Ecosystem survey in the Nordic Seas (IESSNS) that is carried out in July and August, where you express your concern that this information is not yet used in the assessment. You are correct in saying that the methodology has not yet been peer reviewed, but this is not the only reason that it has not been used. The test of any fisheries independent survey index is whether or not it proves to be correlated with converged estimates of stock abundance. Unlike the egg surveys, the IESSNS survey does not cover the whole distribution area of mackerel, so its success depends on whether the proportion of the mackerel stock in that area at that time of year is more or less constant. If the distribution patterns of mackerel vary greatly from year to year, the survey may not prove to be a reliable indicator of total abundance. It will take several years before a time series can be built up to test this. We might investigate the possibility of extending the IESSNS survey to other areas, but this would present its own challenges. Different methodologies would need to be applied in different areas, to reflect the differences the distribution of mackerel in the water column, which would complicate the exercise of combining the results. A more cost effective method might be to increase the frequency of the egg surveys from triennial to biennial.

#### Atlanto Scandian Herring

It is clear from the ICES advice that the Atlanto-Scandian herring stock is in decline. This is reflected in the TAC that would result from applying the agreed management plan, which at 619,000 tonnes represents a 26% reduction from the 2012 TAC. Whilst I agree with your view that we should ensure true and reliable recording of landings, the fundamental issue with this stock is that recruitment has been very poor since 2005. Given that the juveniles do not mature until they are between 4 years old, we can expect the decline to continue until at least 2016. In this light, the Commission will continue to urge the coastal states to exercise caution in the setting of TACs over the next few years.


#### Inspection in the pelagic fisheries

You referred to the establishment of a comprehensive international inspection teams to ensure true and reliable recording of landings. In that regard, I am pleased to inform you that at the recent meeting of Coastal States on mackerel in October in London, it was decided to create a Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (MSC) Fact-Finding Working Group. The Working Group, composed of operative MCS experts, will focus on fact-finding to establish best practice in monitoring, control and surveillance both at sea and on land, with the goal of securing the best possible level playing field for fisheries on

certain jointly-managed pelagic stocks including mackerel, Norwegian spring-spawning (Atlanto-Scandian) herring and blue whiting.

I thank you for your continued interest and constructive input. Should you have any question on this advice, you can contact Olivier Baudelet, coordinator of the RACs ([olivier.baudelet@ec.europa.eu](mailto:olivier.baudelet@ec.europa.eu); +32.2.295.68.70).

Yours sincerely,



Lowri Evans

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