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Date: 25 July 2017
Our reference: 1617/PAC 102
Subject: Natural mortality of horse mackerel

Dear Mr Aguiar Machado,

Natural mortality (M) is a parameter in most fish stock assessments, including the ICES assessment on Western horse mackerel. Although scientific research¹ has shown that it is highly inadequate to assume constant natural mortality within a stock, ICES has kept natural mortality constant at 0.15 over all ages since 1980.

Recent work in the Pelagic AC has explored alternative options for natural mortality and concluded that empirical models or multi-species models could be used to derive possible patterns for M at age.

The Pelagic AC therefore kindly asks the Commission to submit a request to the ICES Working Group on Widely Distributed Stocks (WGWIDE) to evaluate alternative options for age varying M and the possible impacts on the assessment.

We believe that carrying out this evaluation is of the utmost importance to obtain a well-functioning stock assessment which is a prerequisite for developing a management strategy for the stock.

In case you require any further clarification please do not hesitate to contact the secretariat.

I am looking forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Sean O'Donoghue'.

Sean O'Donoghue
Chairman Working Group II

¹ Vetter, E. F. (1988). Estimation Of Natural Mortality In Fish Stocks: A Review. *Fishery Bulletin* 86 (1): 25-43.

