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Date: 13 July 2017
Our reference: 1617/PAC 98
Subject: Wanted vs unwanted catch of North Sea horse mackerel

Dear Mr Aguiar Machado,

In last year's ICES advice for North Sea horse mackerel the wanted catch corresponding to the catch advice has been set at 15.200 tonnes. However, new information from 2015 indicated a discard rate of 16.7% from bottom-trawl fisheries not directed at horse mackerel. ICES subsequently decided to add these discards to its catch advice resulting in an advice of 18.247 tonnes.

The Pelagic AC strongly advised against this quota top-up for several reasons:

1. North Sea horse mackerel is a data-limited stock. Indices provide an overall perspective, but are highly uncertain.
2. No reference points are available for this stock.
3. The stock seems stable, but at a low level.
4. Concern that the quota top-up would not be distributed to the fleet having the discards.

Unfortunately, the Commission did not follow the Pelagic AC advice in its proposal for fishing opportunities for 2018 and the Council indeed decided to allocate the quota top-up to Member States that already have quota for North Sea horse mackerel rather than to the fleet that encounters discards.

Continuing this practice will lead to an upwards spiral of increased fishing mortality, likely having harmful effects on stock status. In the opinion of the Pelagic AC this practice is not in line with the aim of the Common Fisheries Policy to ensure sustainable fisheries and to implement MSY.



We therefore strongly urge the Commission not to add discards to its TAC proposal for North Sea horse mackerel in 2018 and instead propose a TAC that corresponds to the wanted catch which excludes discard information.

In case you have any questions regarding this advice please do not hesitate to contact the secretariat.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Esben Sverdrup-Jensen'.

Esben Sverdrup-Jensen

Chairman Working Group I