



EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

The Director-General

Brussels,  
MARE/C5/SS

**Subject: Benchmark meeting for Western horse mackerel in 2023**

Dear Mr Sean O'Donoghue,

Thank you for your letter of 20 April on the benchmark meeting for Western horse mackerel in 2023 and for the transmission in annex of the meeting report from the PelAC Focus Group meeting on the three horse mackerel stocks held on 3 April 2023.

As you know, my services are closely following this topic and also participated to the above-mentioned Focus Group.

I take note of your recommendations and views concerning the organisation of a possible inter-benchmark meeting.

I would like to inform you that the joint EU-UK terms of reference requesting ICES an inter-benchmark assessment in 2023 were sent on 16 May 2023. Your concerns with regard to the ongoing genetics work were duly reflected in the request.

Unfortunately, ICES replied on 31 May 2023 that it cannot accept this request for the time being. This is due to multiple reasons, but mainly to the fact that a benchmark process for the three horse mackerel stocks is already underway and scheduled to be completed in the first half of 2024. Considering the significant amount of work related to the requests raised in the terms of reference and the fact that the Southern stock was already being assessed at the end of May/early June, there was no time to implement benchmark changes at this stage. With regard to the genetic works, ICES specifically noted that while recent genetic work does indicate potential changes in stock boundaries, there remains a need for more baseline samples from the Southern area.

Rest assured that we are fully aware of the socio-economic importance of the Western horse mackerel stock and of the challenges linked with a possible confirmation of the ICES zero-catch advice for 2024.

Mr Sean O'Donoghue  
Chairman Pelagic AC  
[sean@kfo.ie](mailto:sean@kfo.ie)  
[info@pelagic-ac.org](mailto:info@pelagic-ac.org)  
Louis Braillelaan 80  
2719 EK Zoetermeer  
The Netherlands

It will surely be an important topic of discussions in the upcoming annual consultations with the UK and we remain committed to seek a solution that is viable for the sector and fully in line with the Common Fisheries Policy.

Once more, thank you and members of the PelAC for your active involvement and views regarding the horse mackerel stocks. I am looking forward to our continued fruitful cooperation. Should you have any further questions on this reply, please contact Silvia Scalco, desk officer in MARE C5 ([silvia.SCALCO@ec.europa.eu](mailto:silvia.SCALCO@ec.europa.eu)), or Julia Rubeck, coordinator for the Advisory Councils ([Julia.RUBECK@ec.europa.eu](mailto:Julia.RUBECK@ec.europa.eu)), who will forward it to relevant colleagues.

Yours faithfully,

Charlina VITCHEVA