



EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

The Director-General

Brussels  
MARE.C.5/NG/vr

Dear Mr Brouckaert,

Thank you for your letter dated 3 May containing the NWWAC advice regarding technical measures in the Celtic Sea. It was a pleasure to exchange with you during the informal meeting organised by the Belgian Presidency.

As you note, the EU and the UK are committed to working together to identify appropriate ways to reduce unwanted catches of both cod and whiting. This work is ongoing, and the EU and the UK will have further technical meetings in the coming weeks to assess progress, to update our common understanding on the state of the stocks and to consider next steps.

In this regard, your advice, observations on recent catch history and changes in vessel numbers are all very useful. Catches in the recent past are more aligned with the by-catch TAC which will hopefully reduce fishing pressure. It is also important to support the recovery of Celtic Sea whiting. This in the past has supported important fisheries and it should be a shared objective to return to this position.

While I note your view that selectivity efforts have reached a maximum, unwanted catches are still high and, for example over 30% of whiting, 22% of haddock and 45% of catches are discarded. Further improvements are therefore necessary and while we share general concerns regarding the impact of climate change on species distribution, fishing pressure on all three stocks remains above  $F_{MSY}$ . In order to provide stocks with the resilience they need, we must reduce fishing pressure and the level of unwanted catches.

I note your concerns regarding regulatory complexities and the potential for unintended consequences and my team will reach out to you to have a better understanding of where you see the potential for simplification. At the same time, I note that the discussion with the UK to review the technical measures in the Celtic Sea provides an excellent opportunity to potentially address some of these concerns.

While Brexit has introduced new working methods with the UK through the Specialised Committee on Fishers (SCF), my services have frequent interactions with Member States on all the issues dealt with under the SCF and these interactions help shape the Commission

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position for discussions and consultations with the UK. Similarly, the inter-AC Brexit Forum provides a good opportunity for the Commission to keep the ACs informed of developments in the SCF and importantly, provides a forum for the Commission to listen to the views of the ACs on the issues of concern.

I also appreciate the proactive work of the NWWAC by setting up open seminars on key issues such as the management of king scallops, impacts of climate change on cod stocks and the joint initiative with the North Sea AC on crab management.

This work is very important for forthcoming discussions under the TCA and will also help shape EU-UK commitments for the development of multi-year strategies. This constructive interaction between the ACs, Member States and the Commission is very much welcomed and encouraged.

Should you have any questions on this reply, please contact Mr Norman Graham ([Norman.Graham@ec.europa.eu](mailto:Norman.Graham@ec.europa.eu)) and Ms Julia Rubeck, coordinator for the Advisory Councils (functional mailbox: MARE-AC@ec.europa.eu).

Yours faithfully,

Charlina VITCHEVA