



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES
THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL

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M. Alexandre Rodríguez
North Western Waters Regional
Advisory Council
Irish Sea Fisheries Board
Crofton Road
Dun Laoghaire
Co. Dublin
Ireland

Subject: Management of Sole in Division VIIe

Dear Mr Rodríguez,

I am pleased to reply concerning the NWWRAC's opinion about the topic in title.

I share the NWWRAC's concern about the absence of specific advice from ICES and STECF concerning the state of the stock in relation to specific reference points, and the exact fishing opportunities for 2009.

The Commission places the highest importance on the implementation of Community legislation. The existing plan concerning VIIe sole should therefore be implemented if at all possible. However, that plan depends on the availability of advice on fishing opportunities from STECF in accordance with a specific fishing mortality reduction target. It is evident that that STECF has been unable to provide such an advice. The plan cannot therefore be implemented in 2010 and I concur with your conclusion that the application of the plan must be effectively suspended until a new advice is provided.

The NWWRAC asks that the Commission should request a further review by STECF of the ICES advice. I can agree with this, but I have to bear in mind that STECF has provided its review of the ICES advice concerning this stock in its report of 17 July. STECF may well have little more to say until more data can be made available.

Like yourselves, I find the STECF and ICES advice uncomfortable in management terms, but I believe that management now has to take up its responsibilities and propose action based on the advice that has been provided. This does not of course preclude further scientific examination.

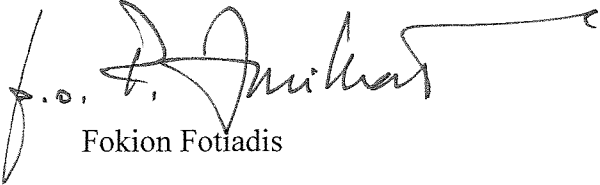
Given the present impossibility of applying the long-term plan for 2010, sole in VIIe should be treated on the same basis as other fish stocks not under plans. The Commission Communication "Consultation on Fishing Opportunities for 2010", (COM(2009) 0224

final) sets out what approach the Commission would take in such circumstances. For a stock where STECF advises that the state of the stock is not known precisely and advises a reduction in fishing effort (i.e. a "Category 7") stock, the Commission would propose to reduce the TAC by up to 15% and would ask STECF to advise on the appropriate level of effort. In the absence of specific advice, a similar reduction in effort as of TAC would logically apply. This is presently the case as STECF advises that "current F is well above sustainable levels and that in order to reduce fishing mortality a reduction in effort is required rather than TAC controls alone."

I appreciate that the NWWRAC can subscribe to the objectives of long-term sustainable exploitation and management and the use of a fishing mortality rate of 0.27 as a target to achieve that end. I hope that the technical problems presently experienced by ICES and STECF can be resolved in order that this goal can be reached with high confidence.

I am aware of the efforts that have already been made towards achieving sustainable exploitation of this stock. However, while the advice is unclear on specific fishing opportunities, it is very clear that further reductions in fishing mortality are necessary, though I know this will be difficult for the fishers concerned with exploiting this stock. I hope you will be able to support the Commission concerning these difficult but necessary measures.

Yours sincerely



Fokion Fotiadis