



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

Directorate General

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M. Sam Lambourn
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Subject: NWWRAC Advice on spurdog

Dear Mr Lambourn

Thank you for sending me the NWWRAC opinion on the 5% by-catch limit concerning spurdog.

As you will be aware, the catches of spurdog have fallen from some 60 000t in 1991 to some 2 500t. This is one of the largest declines in European waters, greater even than for the North Sea cod stock. The situation is clearly very serious. The International Council for the Exploration of the Sea have advised that :

"The stock is depleted and may be in danger of collapse. Targeted fisheries should not be permitted to continue, and bycatch in mixed fisheries should be reduced to the lowest possible level. The TAC should cover all areas where spurdog are caught in the northeast Atlantic and should be set at zero (...)."

ICES have also recommended the introduction of a **maximum** landing length (MLL) of 100cm in order to deter fisheries from targeting areas where large females occur.

Finally, ICES have also advised that *"survivorship of spurdog released from longline fisheries is thought to be high, but will be lower in gillnet and trawl fisheries."*, and that *"because spurdog is caught as a bycatch in demersal fisheries, they would benefit from a reduction in overall demersal fishing effort."*

I understand that there is a strong divergence of opinion within the RAC between the catching sector and the other sectors. I share the concern of several sectors that the measures now in place may not be the most appropriate ones to protect this highly-depleted resource.

The Commission is open to developing improved measures for conservation of this stock and recognises that the current 5% by-catch limit, by itself, falls short of implementing

the scientific advice on this stock. I will therefore be attentive to the development of new advice concerning specific measures both from scientific committees and from the RACs to develop better conservation measures. In particular, I would welcome the RAC's advice on a substantially lowered TAC and on a maximum landing length as advised by ICES as well as on the specific questions raised in Annex. A detailed reply to these questions will assist in the development of better management measures.

In the meantime, however, the 5% by-catch allowance is the main management measure that will discourage fishers from targeting spurdog aggregations, given that effort reductions have been less than originally anticipated. The 5% by-catch limit is clearly a necessary incentive, and will promote discarding only to the extent that fishers are unable to avoid areas of concentrations of these fish.

Yours sincerely,



Fokion Fotiadis

ANNEX

Supplemental questions to NWWRAC concerning spurdog:

1. Where are most spurdogs caught? In what depths of water, in which areas, and in which seasons? Are they caught more by day or at night? What are the relative quantities caught in different areas and different seasons?
2. In which kinds of fishing gear are spurdogs caught? Please estimate the relative quantities of spurdog caught in each principal type of fishing gear.
3. When important quantities of spurdog are caught by accident, what is the main fishery being prosecuted? What are the important target species when spurdog is a by-catch?