



CONSEIL CONSULTATIF POUR
LES EAUX OCCIDENTALES
SEPTENTRIONALES

NORTH WESTERN
WATERS
ADVISORY COUNCIL

CONSEJO CONSULTIVO PARA
LAS AGUAS
NOROCCIDENTALES

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OPINION

Response to the *Consultation on Fishing Opportunities for 2018 under the common fisheries policy (COM (2017) 368 final)*, launched online by the European Commission on 6th July 2017.

15 September 2017

The NWWAC had the opportunity to exchange preliminary views with reference to the ICES presentation of scientific advice for fish stocks in North Western Waters for 2018 and the Policy Statement from DGMARE at the meeting of the NWWAC Working Groups in Edinburgh (4th to 6th July, 2017).

Further to these discussions, the members of the NWWAC have considered the Communication from the Commission on the State of Play of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) and Consultation on the Fishing Opportunities for 2018 and have developed an opinion on the way in which levels of fishing effort and quotas are set according to the new common fisheries policy and on the basis of scientific advice.

The NWWAC intends that this opinion will be its major contribution to the development of the thinking of the EC and relevant Member States on the fishing opportunities in the North Western Waters for 2018.

1. General comments

The NWWAC notes that significant progress has been achieved in implementing the 2013 CFP reform and that there has been a steady increase in stocks where the TAC is in line with MSY advice, with an associated increase in the average stock biomass in the North East Atlantic.

The NWWAC also welcomes the acknowledgement that CFP governance has clearly shifted to a more decentralised governance, including multiannual plans and delegated acts adopted through regionalisation, as it has had productive and respectful collaboration with the NWW Member States Group, particularly regarding the implementation of delegated acts regarding discard plans.

In this context, the NWWAC will provide support and advice to the Commission and the NWW Regional Member State Group and remains resolved to assist the process to reduce the number of individual stocks exploited above F_{MSY} in the North-East Atlantic and the development of an objective framework to implement the landing obligation.

The NWWAC appreciates the current level of professional discussion with ICES and is keen to progress this engagement through the provision of evidence-based input and feedback regarding the scientific assessment of fish stocks.

2. The Landing Obligation

In response to significant concerns regarding the implementation of the Landing Obligation in mixed fisheries, the NWWAC in co-operation with the NWW Member States Group, has developed a comprehensive tool (Choke Mitigation Tool), which serves to identify and mitigate the choke risks at fishery level. The tool has initially been populated for the Celtic Sea, where the mixed fishery provides a significant challenge and will be populated for the remaining sub-geographical areas in North Western Waters in mid-September before being discussed with the North Western Waters Member States Group.

The NWWAC recognises that the choke toolbox will not resolve the entire choke situation in many fisheries. Discussions will be needed on how to resolve these remaining choke problems and identify potential legislative changes that might be required. The NWWAC acknowledges that the implementation of the landing obligation (LO) is an important requirement of the CFP, but it also recognises that it will be difficult to balance the different objectives of the CFP, but it also recognises that it will be difficult to balance the different objectives of the CFP. At the same time, the NWWAC draws attention to a number of major obstacles ahead.

Of particular significance and of key concern to the NWWAC is the lack of reference to the issue of how mixed fisheries would be managed where a zero-TAC existed for a species and the capture of that species would represent a choke for the entire fishery. The NWWAC considers that this is a major issue of critical importance, which needs to be resolved before the implementation of the landing obligation for all remaining TAC species on 01 January 2019.

The NWWAC notes that the landings of fish below MCRS reported by Member States are low across the different regions and that funding under the EMFF to improve the infrastructure of ports and modifications on board fishing vessels to handle unwanted catches has been limited to date. The NWWAC remains concerned that the supports and facilities critically required ahead of the full implementation of the landing obligation, in 2019, have yet to be established.

3. Specific comments on the advice for stocks in North Western Waters

The NWWAC provides the following comment regarding the assessment and the consequences of the advice for some specific stocks, for which advice was released in July 2017.

General

The NWWAC recognises that the continued growth and rebuilding of the Northern hake stock is a direct consequence of appropriate management actions and the implementation of adaptive fishing practices.

The NWWAC considers that the noted extension of the geographic range of this stock provides reason for the development of an assessment methodology for inter-species interaction particularly in those mixed fisheries within North Western Waters, where this expansion is noted.

The NWWAC notes that the level of hydrocarbon exploitation activity in NWW is significant and that the knowledge on the effects of seismic noise on fish stocks in these waters is limited.

The NWWAC welcomes the Commission's decision to allow for the removal of TACs for specific stocks on the basis of evidence-based assessment by ICES, which concludes that there is no risk to the conservation of the stock (e.g. dab and flounder in the North Sea). The NWWAC considers this to be a measured and considered approach and agrees that this has the potential to facilitate the implementation of the landing obligation.

West of Scotland

Given the need for more detailed knowledge of key stocks in this area, the NWWAC recommends that cod and haddock in 6a and 6b and whiting stocks in 6b should be evaluated by ICES and that a rebuilding plan for cod should be included.

NWWAC members note that significant recruitment driven fluctuations create a situation, which affects multi-annual planning by fishing businesses. The NWWAC advocates for a process of quota management, which smooths the transitions between years of high and low stock abundance, assists in the economic stability of the fishery and improves the sustainability of the stock, by ensuring that mortality does not exceed F_{msy} and that the stock is allowed to recover to levels above those capable of producing MSY .

In addition, and consistent with the use of the best available technology, the NWWAC promotes the need for a genetic assessment of cod and whiting stocks to determine their genetic identity and whether a difference between stocks in the north of this area and other areas exists.

Regarding qualifications provided on the effects of predators, the NWWAC notes the comments on grey seals and requests that the purpose and impact of these comments is provided in further detail in the context of stock management.

In this context, the NWWAC considers that the effects of other marine predators requires attention and suggests that the effects of hake predation on the gadoid stocks in the area should be requested of ICES.

Celtic Sea

It is the observation of NWWAC members that an apparent misalignment between the TAC for haddock and the widespread abundance of the species across the main fishing grounds in the Celtic Sea, has generated a high rate of discards of mature haddock.

This is contrary to the opinion of ICES, which identifies that the predominant issue lies with the discard of juvenile haddock. The NWWAC identifies this difference of opinion as being of critical importance and requiring urgent clarification.

The impending extension of the Landing Obligation to this stock (at the latest by January 2019) also suggests that urgent action is required to avoid a serious choke problem developing in the fisheries of this area.

Discard estimates based on incomplete data means that quota uplifts designed to cover fish previously discarded, are unlikely to resolve the problem.

The NWWAC considers that the resolution of this issue requires the following combined initiatives to strengthen the knowledge base on Celtic Sea haddock in preparation for the full implementation of the landing obligation in 2019.

The NWWAC is committed to reviewing and further developing NWWAC advice on this stock.

Regarding whiting, the NWWAC request that ICES determine the factors, which influence the discard data for whiting and provide their opinion as input to further discussion on this issue.

The NWWAC agrees that there is a requirement to improve the knowledge of plaice and megrim stocks and would like to discuss with ICES how NWWAC members can assist in bridging the knowledge gap in order to speed up the work of the Advisory Council with Member States and Commission. Further engagement of the NWWAC, ICES and the Commission is required to identify mechanisms to improve the quality of data from these fisheries.

The NWWAC has noted on an annual basis since 2009 that there is a requirement to rationalise the management of nephrops in FU16. Following comments from the Commission, the NWWAC, with the support of the Marine Institute (Ireland) is addressing the concerns raised and is developing a submission for ICES and STECF so that they can assess whether the removal of the TAC for nephrops in this area will deliver on CFP commitments to achieve the MSY exploitation rate and rebuild the stock to levels above those capable of producing MSY.

The NWWAC is also concerned that there appears to be no consideration of the interaction of seismic surveys and fisheries on fish stocks in this area and requests that the effects of such activity should be included in stock assessments.

English Channel

The NWWAC notes that its advice for sole in the Eastern Channel (Division 7.d), approved by STECF, has resulted in the expected improvement in stock status and is committed to reviewing and further developing the NWWAC advice on this stock.

The NWWAC requests clarification from the Commission on the reasoning and purpose for the inclusion of stock advice on non-quota species in 7.d and 7.e (i.e. brill, witch, lemon sole and striped red mullet).

The NWWAC identifies the need for further discussion on Seabass stocks and will provide an assessment of the advice on this stock, once it becomes available.

Irish Sea

In consideration of the advice and in support of actions to improve the status of stocks in the Irish Sea, the NWWAC will engage with the ICES benchmark for the Irish Sea to focus attention on developing an understanding of the dynamics for the potential mixing of stocks between the Celtic Sea and area 6 into the Irish Sea.

The NWWAC requests that sole is added to the benchmark for the Irish Sea and that the output from the Belgian fisheries/science partnership would be considered by this meeting.

In the context of MPAs, the NWWAC requests clarification on the issue of reporting frequency and specifically notes that the requirement for a reporting frequency of 10 minutes should not be necessary should there be equitable implementation of the control regulation based on the availability of common information of appropriate detail across Member States.

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