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Date: 20 October 2011  
Our reference: 1112PRAC17/AC  
Subject: Fishing opportunities 2012 herring stocks  
CC: Sabela Perez-Maiz, John Spencer (by e-mail)

Dear Ms Evans,

At the latest Pelagic RAC Working Groups meeting on 6 October 2011, the Pelagic RAC discussed the ICES advice for fishing opportunities in 2012 for several local herring and widely distributed pelagic stocks and came to agreement on a number of recommendations which were supported by the industry as well as the environmental NGOs. These recommendations were thereafter approved unanimously by the Executive Committee through written procedure.

Please find the recommendations attached in the Annex. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the secretariat.

Looking forward to your response,

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Aukje Coers', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Ms Aukje Coers  
Pelagic RAC secretariat

## **Annex 1: Recommendations on fishing opportunities for herring stocks**

### North East Atlantic herring

The Pelagic RAC recommends that the TAC is set in accordance with the ICES advice, following the LTM plan, i.e. at 833 kt. At the same time the Pelagic RAC recommends that the HCR is evaluated to see if the target F could be increased, considering that  $F_{MSY}$  has been estimated by ICES at 0,15.

### North East Atlantic Mackerel

Considering that the major problems in this fishery are at a political level, in which the Pelagic RAC cannot have a substantial role, the Pelagic RAC recommends that:

- All parties should spare no effort in finding an international acceptable agreement, with an outtake based on the existing management plan;
- In the case that no agreement is found in 2011, the EU and Norway should together base their TACs on the existing management plan, using the upper boundary of the F-range in the LTM plan.

### Blue whiting

The Pelagic RAC is of the opinion that the current advice from ICES confirms the RAC's views of last year in relation to the enormous cut in TAC for 2011 having been caused mostly by a flawed survey. The Pelagic RAC acknowledges that the ICES advice to increase the TAC by an almost ten-fold in 2012 does not signal an increase in the health of the stock of such magnitude, but merely corrects for last year's error. In light of this, the Pelagic RAC recommends that the ICES advice is followed and the TAC set at 391 kt.

The Pelagic RAC furthermore notes that the Focus Group which was established in autumn 2010 has had 4 meetings since and has made tremendous progress on evaluating the strengths and weaknesses in the assessment as well as the management of the blue whiting stock. Much of the results on the former will now feed into the benchmark process of ICES. In relation to the latter, hopefully, the remainder of the work – i.e. to develop a new HCR and possibly additional management measures to be included in an amended LTM plan – can be finalised under the auspices of ICES in the first half of 2012, well in time of WGWISE of ICES. On a separate issue, which was discussed at length during the focus group meetings, the Pelagic RAC would like to ask the Commission to request ICES to comment on what research efforts are needed (including feasibility, costs and timeframe) to resolve the issue of establishing whether or not separate stock components exist.

### Western horse mackerel

The Pelagic RAC recommends that the TAC is set based on the LTM plan, i.e. at 183 kt. The Pelagic RAC notes that ICES advises in accordance with the MSY option which provides the opportunity to set the TAC substantially higher, i.e. at 211 kt. However, the Pelagic RAC is committed to keep following the management plan as the plan has proven



to offer stability in catches over the last number of years. The Pelagic RAC sees no benefit to deviate from this view even in a situation where adopting the MSY approach gives a 12% increase.

#### North Sea horse mackerel

The Pelagic RAC recommends that the TAC is rolled over, i.e. set at 46,505 tons considering that the scientific advice for this stock has not changed in substance over the last three years even though the wording of the advice has changed. Furthermore the Pelagic RAC is of the view that the re-alignment of the areas two years ago makes it impossible to compare catches between earlier and recent years. It will take a number of years before the trends in catches will be apparent. This is a stock that ICES should be requested to use a trends based methodology for assessment rather than trying to do an analytical assessment which has not proving to be feasible.

#### Southern horse mackerel

The Pelagic RAC recommends following the ICES advice and setting the TAC at 30,800 tons.

#### Irish Sea herring

The Pelagic RAC notes that the SSB of this stock has shown a major increase in recent years. While  $B_{LIM}$  is estimated by ICES at 6000 tons, SSB is currently estimated at 130,000 tons. The Pelagic RAC therefore finds it remarkable to say the least that the Commission is proposing a 25% cut in TAC for this stock. Rather, the Pelagic RAC recommends that an increase in TAC is allowed, while being cautious by not exceeding average catches of the past 18 years. The Pelagic RAC therefore recommends that the TAC for 2012 is set at the level of current landings, i.e. at 6,072 tons. The Pelagic RAC further notes that the Northern Irish pelagic industry together with scientists is working on a proposal for a LTM plan, which hopefully can be presented to the Commission in the course of next year, after which TACs could be set based on this LTM plan.

#### Boarfish

The Pelagic RAC is proud to be able to provide advice on this stock for the first time. As you are probably well aware, industry members in the Pelagic RAC have facilitated an extensive acoustic survey in 2011, which greatly enhanced ICES to provide advice on this stock. This major effort by the industry has most importantly lead to the insight that this stock is far from overexploited and increases in catches are likely possible in the future. For the TAC of 2012, the Pelagic RAC recommends that the ICES advice is followed and a precautionary approach is taken by setting a TAC that does not allow catches to be above the average level of the last three years, i.e. at 82,000 tons. In order to ensure consistency in data collection and to develop an analytical assessment for this stock, the Pelagic RAC furthermore recommends that the stock is included under the Data Collection Regulation in 2012.