



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

DIRECTOR GENERAL

Brussels,
DG MARE

Ms. Aukje Coers
Pelagic RAC secretariat
Treubstraat 17
PO box 72
2280 AB Rijswijk
NETHERLANDS

Subject: PELRAC advice on fishing opportunities for 2012

Reference: Your letters referenced 1112PRAC04/AC and 1112PRAC17/AC

Dear Ms Coers,

Thank you for your correspondence on fishing opportunities for several pelagic species in the waters of interest to the European Union. Please accept my apologies for this late reply. Your letters were of great interest and was an important part of the input leading to the decisions taken at the Council of Ministers at the end of last year. I would like to give you some more detailed feedback on a number of the important stocks. I am aware that the Pelagic RAC has already had a discussion on outcomes of the December Council at its last meeting held on 8 February last. My services were able to pass on information and feedback to you at that occasion. I hope the elements provided below are useful to you as a matter of record and as considerations to bear in mind for future exercises.

North Sea herring

In your earlier letter of 26 September, you suggested making a request to ICES to consider a revised long-term management plan. Both Parties understood that following the exceptional increase in the SSB during 2010, the existing plan with a TAC constraint allowing for an increase of the TAC of only 15%, was extremely precautionary. With this in mind, they asked ICES to evaluate a number of options deviating from the plan with a view to establishing a less constrained TAC for 2012. The overall TAC was consequently established jointly by the Union and Norway in December at a level of 405 000 tonnes. Subsequently, it is the intention of the Union and Norway to revise the existing management plan during 2012 following the ICES benchmarking exercise.

Western Baltic herring

Clearly there were also implications for the herring to be found in the waters of the Skagerrak (IIIa). Herring fisheries in this area exploit several stocks including both the North Sea autumn-spawning herring and the Baltic Sea spring-spawning herring. The EU position continues to be that the Skagerrak herring should be fixed at a level taking this into account and that the TAC should be consistent with the sustainable exploitation of the stock. To this end, the TAC in the area was set at 45 000 tonnes for 2012 on an *ad hoc* basis. No doubt we will return to this matter again at the time of the consultations with Norway for 2013.

Celtic Sea Herring

Based on plan embedded in Council & Commission statement from December 2009, the Commission had proposed an increase of 60 %. This was accepted at Council to give a TAC of 21 100 tonnes.

We acknowledge the fact that the Pelagic RAC was in favour of applying the harvest control rule it has proposed for this stock and according to which the TAC would have been increased by 30% instead of the 60% decided. The Commission held the view that until there is a final assessment of options for management of this stock (including any aspects possibly related to mixed fisheries management, where appropriate), it is held to abide by the commitments embodied in its joint statement with the Council. We look forward to assessing the results of analysis currently underway in ICES and STECF regarding options for management for this stock, in which we hope the Pelagic RAC will involve itself actively.

Herring in VIIbc VIa South

We note the wishes of the RAC for the fishing opportunities for this stock to follow the proposed management plan, which was reviewed by the November Plenary of STECF. STECF noted several elements of the plan that would require improvement, including the need to foresee the closure of the fishery if stock falls below a certain level. We take it that the Pelagic RAC is ready to consider this advice and that it intends to discuss this stock at its July sessions, and we will be interested in following this work closely.

In the meantime, the Commission proposed a reduction of the TAC by 25 % following its precautionary line in respect of data-poor stocks. The Council finally agreed on a lesser reduction of 5% which resulted in a TAC of 4 247 tonnes.

Irish Sea Herring

Here too, the Commission proposal followed its line on precautionary harvesting levels for data-poor stocks, entailing a reduction of the TAC by 25%. The December Council agreed on a TAC of 4 752 tonnes, which means a decrease of 10 %.

We take note that a management plan for this stock is on your work programme. We will be pleased to follow your initiative during the year.

Blue whiting

We have noted that in the opinion of the Pelagic RAC, there have been a number of uncertainties about the blue whiting stock, particularly in relation to the drastic cuts imposed during 2011 as a result of a "flawed" survey. Whether or not this view is shared, the long-term management plan as agreed by the Parties has led to an increase in the TAC level for 2012, leading to an EU quota of 109 764 tonnes less a portion reattributed to Norway. This quota attribution was agreed by all Coastal States in October and endorsed by the Russian Federation as an active non-Coastal State through its acceptance of the overall TAC of 391 000 tonnes. This represents a significant increase in the availability of quotas compared to 2011. However,

it is clear that there is still a continuing decline in the stock. We would therefore not expect to see any great improvements in the coming years.

STECF was requested to give advice on a potential split of the management area for the stock. Based on a review of the evidence for stock separation in northeast Atlantic blue whiting, STECF concluded that there are 'northern' and 'southern' stocks that, if technically feasible, should be treated at separate stocks for assessment and management. A boundary of a possible 'mixing area' between the two stocks was also identified. STECF recommends involving ICES to undertake a benchmark assessment and, if feasible, setting a management plan that should deal separately with each stock and with the mixing area.

Western Horse mackerel

The Commission, as per its established policy, proposed a TAC consistent with the rules established in the management plan – originally proposed by the Pelagic RAC – still in discussion by the co-legislators. This entailed a 1% TAC reduction for an overall TAC for this stock of 183 000 tonnes (split in 2 TAC entries). This was accepted by the Council, and this acceptance signals the willingness of also the Council to support the efforts of stakeholders in developing management solutions through a bottom-up approach.

North Sea Horse mackerel

The Commission initially proposed a 25% cut based on its precautionary line for data-poor stocks. The Council settled on a 5% reduction, entailing a TAC of 34 879 tonnes.

Southern Horse mackerel

The Council agreed on a TAC of 30 800 tonnes, as advised by ICES and supported by the pelagic RAC.

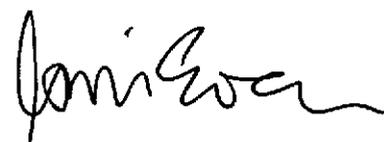
Boarfish

The Commission proposal of a 25% reduction in the TAC for this stock was based, as in many of the cases already discussed, on its precautionary line regarding data poor stocks. However, we were ultimately able to accept an increase of the fishing opportunities to meet the average of catches during the period 2008-2010, with indications that the stock is not overfished. This is what the Pelagic RAC proposed. The Council therefore agreed on a TAC of 82 000 tonnes for this year.

In order to ensure consistency in data collection and to develop an analytical assessment for this stock, Boarfish has been included under the Data Collection Framework in 2012.

I trust you will find the above feedback useful and kindly request to accept once again my apologies for this delayed reply.

Yours sincerely,



Lowri Evans