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Date: 16 October 2013
Our reference: 1314/PRAC09
Subject: Fishing opportunities mackerel and herring stocks 2014- part 2
CC: Ms Martine Aussems, Ms Evangelia Georgitsi (by email)

Dear Ms Evans,

At its latest Working Group I meeting on 3 October 2013 the Pelagic RAC discussed the ICES advice regarding fishing opportunities in 2014 for Northeast Atlantic mackerel and Atlanto-Scandian herring. Furthermore, North Sea autumn spawning herring, Western Baltic spring spawning herring and herring in area VIa South and VIIb,c were discussed during the meeting. The Working Group agreed on a number of recommendations which were unanimously endorsed by the Executive Committee at its meeting on 4 October 2013.

Please find the detailed recommendation in annex 1 and do not hesitate to contact me in case you have any questions.

Yours sincerely,



Verena Ohms
Executive Secretary Pelagic RAC

Annex 1: Recommendation on fishing opportunities for Northeast Atlantic mackerel and several herring stocks in 2014- part 2

Last year the Pelagic RAC asked for clarification regarding the ICES advice for herring stocks in the Celtic Sea and the North Sea which stated for the Celtic Sea that: "*ICES advises that activities that impact on the seabed should not take place in spawning grounds unless they can be shown not to have a negative impact on spawning, larval production or stock dynamics*" and for the North Sea that: "*ICES advises that no bottom disturbing activities, e.g. aggregate extraction, should occur in areas with spawning grounds during the spawning season and within 1 month before and after this period.*"

Furthermore the Pelagic RAC has offered its help in identifying herring spawning grounds. This has led to an initiative between the ICES Herring Assessment Working Group (HAWG) and the Pelagic RAC to combine efforts in this direction and an action plan has been agreed upon. In summary, the next steps will be to arrange a mapping session between HAWG and the Pelagic RAC, receive a reply from WGEXT, perform a literature study on spawning behaviour and seek funding for future work.

1) North Sea autumn spawning herring

The Pelagic RAC appreciates the work in progress between the EU and Norway regarding an amendment of the management plan and wishes to stress the importance of the continued involvement of the stakeholders – all the way till the end.

The Pelagic RAC recommends:

- That the TAC for 2014 will be set at 470.000 tons – in accordance with the existing management plan.
- Nevertheless, there is sufficient evidence that the existing management plan, while performing well in terms of precautions, fails at delivering maximum sustainable yield. Therefore an amendment of the current plan is needed with the following key elements to be adjusted:
 - Target F should be set at 0,25
 - B_{trigger} should equal 1,1 Mio tons
 - An inter annual flexibility of +/-10%, i.e. banking and borrowing, will be included (simulations show that this has no detrimental effects on the stock)
 - A stability mechanism (FIAV) which imposes a 15% constraint on both fishing mortality (F) and interannual TAC variability (IAV) will be included either above B_{lim} or B_{trigger} , i.e. if the preliminary F-value is inside the 15% limits of the F_{HCR} it will be directly applied; if the preliminary F-value is outside the 15% limits of the F_{HCR} it will be brought onto the 15% limits.

2) Herring in ICES area VIa South and VIIb,c

A proposal for a revised rebuilding plan has recently been sent to the Commission. The Pelagic RAC recommends that this rebuilding plan will be sent to STECF for scrutiny, and assuming that it meets the criteria of the precautionary approach, it is recommended using the plan as the basis for setting a TAC for 2014.

3) Western Baltic spring spawning herring

The Pelagic RAC welcomes the efforts taken for this stock by the Commission and Norway to establish a TAC setting method taking into account that herring catches in ICES division IIIa consist of several herring stocks. Although the Pelagic RAC has not been invited to participate in this process it strongly encourages the pursuit of the development of a management plan and a TAC setting procedure. While in light of ongoing consultations between the EU and Norway the Pelagic RAC does not consider it appropriate to advise on a specific TAC number, it would, however, like to emphasize the importance for including both the C- and D-fleet in the TAC setting arrangement.

4) Atlanto-Scandian herring

In relation to Atlanto-Scandian herring the Pelagic RAC would like to express its disappointment and concern regarding the unfortunate situation in which the Faroe Islands decided to step out of the international agreement and unilaterally set a TAC for this stock. This irresponsible behaviour is further aggravated by strong indications of a diminishing stock size. Therefore precaution is needed.

The Pelagic RAC hence recommends:

- That the Commission seeks a return to the international agreement by all parties
- To follow the management plan and set a TAC of 418.000 tons
- That the international inspection team continues its work in ensuring true and reliable recording of landings

5) Northeast Atlantic mackerel

Given that there is no international agreement the Pelagic RAC does not advise on a specific TAC number. However, the Pelagic RAC would like to express its deepest disappointment and concern regarding the new scientific situation which puts this stock into the data-limited category. In light of these frustrating developments the importance of the upcoming benchmark in February 2014 cannot be stressed enough. A finalisation of the analysis of the egg survey is urgently needed before the benchmark and the Pelagic RAC strongly encourages the Commission to push for this process to be completed in due time. Furthermore it has to be kept in mind that the ICES advice remains preliminary and can change as a result of the benchmark exercise.

The Pelagic RAC therefore recommends:

- That the Commission seeks an international agreement that is acceptable to all parties – including and not least the EU industry.