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THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL

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Mr Esben Sverdrup-Jensen
Chairman of Working Group I
Pelagic AC
Louis Braillelaan 80
2719 EK Zoetermeer
The Netherlands

Subject: Clarification on blue whiting Fmsy

Your reference: 1415/PAC 78

Dear Mr. Sverdrup-Jensen,

Thank you for your letter of 13 April 2015 requesting clarification on blue whiting Fmsy. We agree with you that the current management strategy, which pre-dates the ICES benchmarking exercise and recent advice, is no longer appropriate and that the Coastal States should no longer request that ICES uses it as a basis for its advice. Indeed, this situation has caused confusion amongst some stakeholders. At the EU's suggestion, the Coastal States agreed at their April meeting in Clonakilty, Ireland, to request ICES to cease basing its advice on this management strategy.


We agree also with you that the objective should be to establish speedily a revised Coastal State management strategy. Where we may seem to differ is in the assumption that the target of this strategy would necessarily be the Fmsy value of 0.3, as estimated by ICES under certain assumptions. There may be situations that provide for good management reasons to keep fishing mortality below Fmsy. Last year the reason to reduce F to below Fmsy was based on the need to maintain higher spawning biomass levels, thereby increasing TAC stability and reducing the level of risk. This depends on the costs in terms of reduced long term yield. This does not mean that we question the ICES estimate of Fmsy or seek to undermine its valued advice. I would add that should the Coastal States not be in a position to develop a new management strategy in time for 2016 due to the absence of advice on that strategy, they have instructed ICES to base its advice for 2016 on its estimate of Fmsy, as well as F 0.22 and F 0.25 options.

As you point out, the management plan developed by the Pelagic AC in 2012 was evaluated by ICES to be precautionary. The Commission duly presented this plan to the other Coastal States for discussion, however there were misgivings that the double-plateau model of the proposal was overly complicated and did not offer significant benefits over a simpler single plateau model.

The request to ICES on a new long term management strategy that has now been agreed by the Coastal States in Clonakilty last month, is attached to this letter. It is based on the traditional single plateau model, but with a range of fishing mortalities (including the ICES estimate of Fmsy), a range of TAC stability constraints, and with inter-annual quota flexibility of either 10% or 20%. The ICES response will allow us to evaluate the costs and benefits of each option, and we are confident that we will end up with a strategy that is as satisfactory as the Pelagic AC double-plateau model. The preference for the simpler model is a decision by the Coastal States based on the advice ICES has already delivered. It does not of course imply that the ICES evaluation of the Pelagic AC model was rejected.

Thank you again for your continuous and constructive input. If you have any questions on this reply, you may contact Ms Evangelia Georgitsi, coordinator of the Advisory Councils (evangelia.georgitsi@ec.europa.eu; +32.2.295.04.43).

Yours sincerely,



Lowri Evans

Copies: J. Spencer, J. Verborgh, E. Bianchi, E. Georgitsi (DG MARE)