

Sean O'Donoghue
Pelagic Advisory Council
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The Netherlands

Our Ref: G.71/CL/jm

16 September 2024

Subject: Coordination and Harmonisation of Horse Mackerel Stocks Assessments

Dear Sean O'Donoghue,

I am writing to address the concerns raised in your letter, 9 July 2024 PelAC reference: 2324PAC69, about coordination and harmonisation of ICES work on horse mackerel stocks. As you know ICES has recently conducted a benchmark process for the three horse mackerel stocks in the northeast Atlantic. The report of that benchmark contains an up-to-date review of the current knowledge on stock structure for the species in the northeast Atlantic. In addition, [Section 2.4](#) of that report proposes a five-year plan with six key areas (stock identification, biological data, fisheries independent and dependent data, assessment development, benchmark planning) where efforts should be focussed to ensure continued development of the horse mackerel assessments up to and including the next benchmark process.

The assignment of stocks to expert groups takes into account multiple considerations, geographic factors, capacity, timing, expertise etc. Including connected stocks in different expert groups does not necessarily lead to inconsistencies and inefficiencies in the assessment process. That said, I am prepared to discuss this with the relevant Expert Group chairs and the Advisory Committee to assess the pros and cons of alternative configurations. We will report back on this at MIACO in January.

Regarding data deficiencies for the North Sea and western horse mackerel stocks, several issues and recommended actions are included in the benchmark report. ICES is committed to dialogue with requestors, national institutes and stakeholders to prioritise, support and resource enhanced data collection programmes. ICES is also working on science and advice frameworks to support ecosystem-based management and climate aware advice. This includes guidelines on how to incorporate ecosystem change into stock assessments and management advice. I look forward to further discussions on this at MIACO in January.

Sincerely,



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