



EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

The Director-General

Brussels  
MARE.C.3/C5

Dear Mr O'Donoghue,

Thank you for your letter of 9 July 2024 (PelAC reference 2324PAC69) regarding the coordination and harmonisation of Horse Mackerel stocks assessments.

The delay in my response is due to the fact that the ICES scientific report for the benchmark on horse mackerel and boarfish (WKBHMB) was only recently made available <sup>(1)</sup>.

The Commission highly appreciates the Pelagic Advisory Council's active involvement in the scientific process. Your engagement is seen as a positive example of stakeholders' engagement. As you may be aware, DG MARE has recently initiated discussions with Member States and stakeholders to further advance this type of engagement and contribution to the scientific process, as it constitutes a key element for an ecosystem approach to fisheries management.

In your letter, co-addressed to both, me and Dr Lordan, head of ICES ACOM, you request that the Commission coordinates efforts with ICES to address several issues related to the stock assessments for horse mackerel in the northeast Atlantic. These issues include the current segmentation between the process for the assessments of the northern and southern stocks of horse mackerel, data deficiencies and the need for additional scientific surveys, as well as the need to incorporate further ecosystems considerations into the assessments of the stocks, and finally challenges with the management of bycatch TACs.

Regarding the first three issues, all raised during the recent ICES benchmark exercise, the Commission agrees that these matters should indeed be considered by ICES if this can lead to the improvement of the quality of the assessments. However, it is important to note that these are essentially scientific concerns. As you know, the Commission remains mindful

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<sup>(1)</sup> See <https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.25002482>

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of not interfering with the scientific process, and instead ICES is the appropriate body to address these concerns.

In relation to scientific surveys, I would like to recall that Member States already have access to financial support through the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) for data collection. Should additional surveys be required, it is the responsibility of Member States to include these activities into their Data Collection Framework annual work plans.

Regarding the management of the by-catch TAC, as noted in my letter of September last year, I acknowledge the difficulties reported by the industry members of PelAC with regard to the implementation of the by-catch TAC for Western horse mackerel. However, as stated, the allocation of fishing opportunities at national level to fishing vessels is a prerogative of Member States.

I look forward to our continued fruitful cooperation. Should you have any further questions on this reply, please contact Mr Arnaud Peyronnet via email [Arnaud.PEYRONNET@ec.europa.eu](mailto:Arnaud.PEYRONNET@ec.europa.eu) and Ms Julia Rubeck, our Advisory Councils coordinator, via the functional mailbox [MARE-AC@ec.europa.eu](mailto:MARE-AC@ec.europa.eu).

Yours sincerely,

(e-Signed)  
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