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## **Commission: reductions in deep-sea fisheries are inevitable**

***The European Commission has warned that reductions in catches of deep sea species are inevitable either through choice to conserve the stocks concerned or by force as they become fished to depletion. This warning is contained in a review of the management of deep-sea stocks fisheries since their inception a few years ago. The Commission concludes that some of the measures have serious shortcomings, due in part to the dearth of information on the fisheries concerned and in part to reluctance by Member States to curb what are in many cases new fisheries. Weaknesses in implementation have compounded the problems. Action is therefore needed to improve data collection and to increase cooperation among all interested parties.***

Joe Borg, European Commissioner for Fisheries and Maritime Affairs, said: "Decisions to phase out some deep sea fisheries were taken at the November Council. Clearly, further action must be taken to ensure the effective protection of these fragile species. The Commission is fully committed to the task at hand and will continue its work with all the relevant Parties."

Fishing on deep sea species is relatively recent. In an attempt to limit the rapidly expanding fisheries on these species, about which very little was known, total allowable catches (TACs) were set in 2002 for the period 2003-2004. In 2004, TACs were extended to previously unregulated species, and closed areas were introduced for the protection of orange roughy.

Other measures were added to these including the limitation of fishing effort, reporting obligations, data collection and control. In terms of TACs, the report concludes that their effectiveness has been limited due to the fact that they were set at levels beyond what many stocks could sustain. Indeed, the declared catches on most of them have been significantly lower than the TACs. The problem was compounded by the fact that the mixed nature of the fisheries, combined with incomplete information on catch composition, discards and the geographical distribution of the stocks, made it difficult to use TACs in a targeted manner. Despite these problems, the review concludes that TACs still have a role to play, in conjunction with other measures.

Additional problems came from the attempts to control fishing effort through the setting of ceilings on fishing capacity and the use of fishing permits. In practice, the limits set on capacity turned out to be high to constrain fishing effort. This was due to the criteria set for the allocation of the permits. Given the mixed nature of deep sea fisheries, these criteria led to vessels engaged in other fisheries that took deep-sea species as by-catch requiring such permits. This undermined the effectiveness of fishing effort reductions to protect deep sea species while creating problems with control in other fisheries.

Member States are also required to monitor and report to the Commission on the fishing effort of the deep-sea fleet (amount of time spent at sea and the capacity and number of vessels concerned). There were requirements to reduce the fishing effort of vessels holding fishing permits by 10% in 2005 and by a further 10% in 2006 with respect to 2003 levels.

However, as some Member States failed to submit regular reports on fishing effort, the Commission has an incomplete picture of the impact of the different types of fishing gear. It is therefore difficult to assess the actual impact of the effort reductions in 2005 and 2006.

The scientific sampling programme designed to collect much-needed data on catches of deep sea species was poorly implemented by the Member States. This may be partly due to weaknesses in the formulation of the regulation concerned. A new data collection regulation was introduced in 2004 which gave more specific guidance.

In assessing the effectiveness of the closed areas, the Commission concluded that more use should have been made by the Member States' control authorities of the electronic Vessel Monitoring System to warn inspectors of suspicious activities in the closed areas. Concerns have also been raised about the effectiveness of the inspection and surveillance of the designated ports for the landing of deep sea species on which Member States have to communicate their inspection and surveillance procedures to the Commission.

Not surprisingly, the Commission concludes that the implementation of the measures has been too poor to adequately protect deep sea stocks. To better target management of these fisheries, significant improvements in the information flow are required. The most pressing need is for better information on the various fisheries that catch deep-sea species so that future effort controls can be better focussed. The sampling scheme should be harmonised. This needs to be done in consultation with Member States as well as with the relevant contracting parties of the North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC). There should also be greater emphasis on collection of data to assess the impact of the fisheries on the eco-systems. Finally, the monitoring and control procedures must be made more rigorous. There is no doubt that political will on the part of Member States is required to ensure that all the measures identified in the report are effectively implemented.