

22 June 2016

To: The Fisheries Ministers of the EU Member States

Re: Input to the EU Fisheries Council Meeting, 27 and 28 June 2016

Dear Fisheries Minister,

On behalf of the Fisheries Secretariat (FishSec) and Seas At Risk (SAR), we send you our thoughts regarding the Communication from the Commission concerning a consultation on Fishing Opportunities for 2017 (COM(2016) 396 final). We ask you to consider our views during your discussions at the upcoming Council meeting.

Based on a short analysis of the Communication (Annex 1) and an analysis of the Baltic Sea Multiannual Plan (Annex 2), we would like you to consider the following points:

- We welcome the reference of the European Commission on the “well-substantiated circumstances” that allow for the possibility to delay the MSY implementation if it can “seriously jeopardise the social and economic sustainability of the fishing fleets”. However, the Commission does not outline what defines these circumstances. This is a great weakness that needs to be addressed. Any such delays must be clearly documented and a plan for achieving fishing mortality below F_{MSY} by 2020 at the latest, preferably earlier, must be agreed.
- We support the proposal to apply existing multi-annual management plans if they are in line with the MSY objective and therefore set fishing opportunities below F_{MSY} .
- We stress the importance of only making use of the F-ranges listed in Annex 1 Column A of the Baltic MAP. This range complies with a fishing mortality below F_{MSY} which is needed to achieve the objective of biomass levels above B_{MSY} of the CFP. In particular, the cod stocks are in need of sustainable fishing mortality levels.
- Member States should consult Advisory Councils (ACs) earlier during discussions on joint recommendations, both to fulfil the legal requirement under CFP Art. 18.2 and to receive valuable information and advice that can improve the final proposal sent for consideration by the European Commission and subsequent adoption by the co-legislators.
- All decision makers need to make every effort to facilitate the implementation of the landing obligation through the following sequence of measures, where applicable: starting with swapping quotas between Member States, then between producer organisations; then apply the flexibilities foreseen in the CFP Art 15; then increase both technical and tactical selectivity facilitated through EMFF funding requested by Member States, and finally utilize the exemptions provided.
- Only grant a TAC top-up to those fleet segments that are subject to the landing obligation. Under no circumstances should the granted TAC uplift increase the fishing mortality of that fleet segment, nor should an uplift be assigned when the fishing mortality is above F_{MSY} .

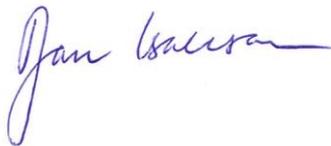
- Data and knowledge on stocks and on the implementation of the landing obligation need to be improved substantially. The success of the CFP implementation cannot be guaranteed if data quality and availability continues to be neglected.

The Communication also attempts to provide an overview of the state of stocks in EU waters. While there has been progress towards MSY, nearly half of the stocks in the northeast Atlantic and adjacent waters that were selected for the Communication are still overfished, and the proportion in the Mediterranean is even higher with the overall level of overfishing being between 2 and 3 times F_{MSY} . Unfortunately, the Commission does not provide any indication of the biomass of the stocks in relation to B_{MSY} , which makes it impossible to assess the progress towards the objective of biomass levels above B_{MSY} of the CFP.

Council has consistently decided on TACs exceeding scientific advice. Over the past 15 years, on average 70 percent of TACs have been higher than scientific recommendations. Whilst progress has been achieved over this timeframe, the vast majority of EU fish stocks are still outside of safe biological limits. To achieve the objective of healthy and abundant fish stocks in line with the CFP, scientific advice must be respected.

In conclusion, we urge the Commission and the EU Member States to stand firm and implement the objectives of the CFP by agreeing sustainable fishing limits for 2017 that will restore and maintain fish populations above biomass levels capable of producing MSY.

Yours sincerely,



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