



**EUROPEAN COMMISSION**  
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL

Brussels,  
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**North Western Waters AC**  
Bertie Armstrong  
Chair of the Executive Committee  
BIM, PO Box 12  
Crofton Road,  
Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin  
IRELAND

**Subject: Sea bass management in North Western Waters**

Dear Mr Armstrong,

Thank you for sending us the NWWAC recommendation on the management of sea bass setting out your approach to this difficult issue and identifying several suggestions you wish to explore. Sea bass management presents particular challenges as it is one stock across a number of management areas, caught in numerous fisheries and with incomplete catch information. It is therefore very encouraging to see the NWWAC progress on this pressing issue.

The Commission will propose management objectives for the northern stock of sea bass as part of the North Western Waters Multi Annual Plan (MAP). The NWW MAP will establish the management framework for mixed demersal fisheries setting management objectives, timelines and safeguards; the specific measures to achieve these objectives are to be delivered via the new approach of regionalisation. To this end, your recommendations are timely and it is important that you discuss them with the North Western Waters and the North Sea Group of Member States concerned. I would also encourage you to further co-operation with the North Sea AC in the developing these recommendations

Let me now come to some of your concrete suggestions. You suggest a revision of the current by-catch limits for vessels using demersal and seine gears, on the basis that by-catches cannot be further minimised in many mixed fisheries. You argue that this would allow a higher level of unavoidable catches to be landed, rather than discarded dead, while development of a targeted fishery can be avoided through the use of a maximum limit.

In the statement to the 2016 Fishing Opportunities Regulation<sup>1</sup>, the Commission had stated that an assessment to determine if the agreed level of by catch was appropriate would be undertaken. To this end, we have on 30 June 2016, received updated catch information that covers a part of the industry. Our experts are now evaluating this information. As you are aware, from 1 July 2016, the vessels will be subject to a monthly catch limit and can therefore cover their unavoidable by-catches with these catch limits. The by-catch levels are therefore not applicable in the second half of 2016. Our evaluation of your concrete suggestion to increase the by-catch levels will therefore feed into measures for sea bass that would be proposed for 2017.

Furthermore, in your framework you provide a number of suggestions for further development and evaluation with the objective to develop a tool box of possible options for sea bass. In order to have your suggestions evaluated, STECF would however need detailed information on current catches and discards. For the selectivity trials, STECF would also need full details of the gears to be tested and their possible application. It is therefore important to gather this information and make it available to DG MARE so that we can take the next step and ask STECF to make the necessary evaluations. In relation to nursery areas, we need to firstly identify the main areas of concern and associated fisheries and give an indication of what actions we wish to consider.

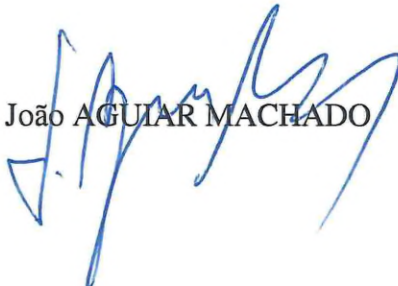
In addition, you request an evaluation of a suggested change in the closed seasons for driftnet fisheries using 110mm mesh nets. As the current measures are only in place since January, it is too early to ask STECF for a comprehensive examination.

Finally, you have identified possible means to address the lack of detailed information on recreational sea bass catches. Your suggestions would certainly provide information on recreational fisheries above that currently required under the Data Collection Framework.

Our experts in DG MARE are looking at your concrete management proposals in detail and I would like to assure you that they will be taking into account for the development of the North Western Waters MAP as well as for the measures to be proposed for sea bass for 2017. In addition, let me reiterate that we would appreciate receiving detailed information on current catches and discards as well as details of the gears to be tested and their application in relation to the selectivity trials you propose.

I would like to thank you again for your constructive and timely input, which is very valuable for the Commission in developing proposals for sea bass management. If you have any question on this reply, please contact Evangelia Georgitsi, co-ordinator of the Advisory Councils ([evangelia.georgitsi@ec.europa.eu](mailto:evangelia.georgitsi@ec.europa.eu); +32.2.295.04.43).

Yours sincerely,

  
João AGUIAR MACHADO

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<sup>1</sup> Council Regulation (EU) 2016/72