



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

Fisheries Policy Atlantic, North Sea, Baltic and Outermost Regions
The Director

Brussels,
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Isabel Artime Garcia
Directora General Recursos Pesqueros
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Subject: NWW group position on choke species

Dear Ms. Artime,

I would like to thank you very much for your letter of 16 November 2017 concerning the position of the North-Western Waters High Level Group (NWWW group) on the issue of choke species.

I would like to acknowledge all the good work done by the NWW group on this challenging topic. We are very well aware of the proactive analysis you have collectively undertaken using the Choke Mitigation Tool. In fact, your analysis was the basis for discussions at the recent seminar on the Landing Obligation in Brussels on 15 November. We understand that on the back of this approach, other regional member state groups and advisory councils are now undertaking their own analyses.

Your letter brings these potential choke situations to the forefront, especially for the high risk situations. In particular, it will help to narrow the focus of our efforts on very specific problems that deserve further analysis, with a view to considering possible alternative approaches outside the toolbox.

We note that with 2019 approaching, MS and stakeholders have intensified their efforts to find practical solutions, and that many solutions have already been found or are under discussion. The Commission supports these efforts and STECF can also help assessing practical solutions put forward.

We believe there is still a margin of progress in identifying solutions based on the tools available in the toolbox. Both Member States and stakeholders need to be prepared to review their practices so far. For example MS may need to review the way they allocate quotas at national level, so that they can optimise catches and reduce the risk for choking situations. We are happy to explore practical ways to inject greater transparency and liquidity in quota swaps, but underline that this is a competency of the MS.

In some fisheries fishermen should adapt their gear further to achieve more selectivity and avoid unwanted catches in the first place. We will collaborate with Member States and industry through further work on choke analysis and will identify practical solutions for further reductions in unwanted catches where science shows that further reductions can be achieved.

Let me at this point also mention that we are concerned about control and the documentation of catches. This is an area that needs continued focus if we are to avoid reputational damage to our fisheries and to the scientific basis underpinning the CFP. Independent research, the audits to date of the control systems of Member States conducted by the Commission, and the 'last-haul' and other project initiatives driven by the EFCA alongside the Member States authorities all indicate a lack of compliance in certain fisheries that are already subject to the discard ban. We need to work together to resolve this and to support the development of a culture of compliance in the fishing industry.

We have only one year to go towards the full implementation of the landing obligation on 1 January 2019. As we all agreed at the December Council, where the Landing Obligation was discussed, it is in our interest to use this time to our best avail.

As we discussed at the November seminar on the landing obligation, it is important that we maintain and increase dialogue between the Commission, Member States and the Advisory Councils in the coming months in order to encourage the use of the available tools in our respective areas of responsibility. Given the timelines, we would encourage Member States to come forward with their Joint Recommendations for discard plans no later than April 2018.

The Commission will also intensify the work with our scientific advisory committee, STECF to assess the potential technical options to mitigate the impacts of the "high risk" stocks so that we can refine our knowledge on how to tackle these.

Finally, where there is evidence that choke situations would still remain even when all the available tools have been exhausted, we will reflect on what additional measures may be required

We look forward to continue working with you and the stakeholders on this crucial matter in the coming months.

Yours sincerely,

Hélène CLARK