

TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR CELTIC SEA COD FOCUS GROUP

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For over eight years, representatives of the main organisations regrouping producers from the Celtic Sea have been conferring to propose management measures encouraging protection of cod stocks. Their propositions are guided by the problem of imposing fleet constraints that are proportional to their action on the stock. These will be limited to the area where cod is found (ICES area VIIf,g) in order to avoid imposing unjustified constraints on vessels present in these areas and the adjacent ones with level efforts granted in accordance to Accession Treaties but neither catching nor targeting cod.

This rationale goes against the rationale of the Commission, who proposed several times that the same formulas as those put together for stock recovery in the North Sea, the Irish Sea and the West of Scotland, be applied to cod stocks in the Celtic Sea.

However, it has been proven scientifically that condition of this stock has not deteriorated as much as the others and all proposals for integration into the existing recovery plans have logically been rejected, without alternative proposals, developed by fishermen, necessarily being accepted. Thus, except for the creation of the Trevoise box, which was set up at the request of professionals, the EU Council hasn't done anything else to protect this stock except reducing its TAC, which only has an inadequate effect on fishing mortality.

In the absence of regulatory measures, area VII f/g remains open to transfers of capacity from areas subject to effort limitations, or to stocks whose quota availability is good. Therefore, it is necessary to institute a management plan relevant to the area and the specific activity of the fleet, taking into account the recommendations that the professional representatives have been making for years provided that this does not impose a limitation of access and use of fishing effort to those fleets that are neither catching nor targeting cod.

Yet, prior to that, the specific situation of the area should be assessed while taking into account the following points:

- The cod distribution area is concentrated mainly on area VII f/g
- The situation of the stock is uncertain
- Most target species that have cod as by-catch also have area VIIf/g as their distribution area (plaice/sole, nephrops, whiting/haddock)
- The various fleets operating in the area have been subjected to different dynamics (increases for some, reductions for others)



A specialised group of the RAC could make a list of the activities in the area and draft proposals for management of this homogeneous fishery space.

This group should consist of representatives from the RAC, scientists and representatives from the administration of various Member States and the Commission.

A first meeting could be devoted to an assessment of the situation:

- 1) Condition of the main relevant stocks and level of knowledge
- 2) Activity of the fleets and evolution of capacity
- 3) Regulatory environment (in effect in area VII f/g and in the adjacent areas), and scheduled evolution (fishing effort in the Western Waters)
- 4) Project of professionals.

Finally, it goes without saying that this group cannot operate without a strong commitment from scientists (points 1 and 2) and from the Commission (point 3). The RAC must make sure of their active participation before deciding to create such a group.