

Dublin, 22 November 2017

Subject: A management strategy for sole in the Eastern Channel (7.d)

Dear Mr Machado,

In 2015¹ and 2016², the NWWAC provided the European Commission with advice on the management of sole in the Eastern Channel (7.d). This advice recognised that the sole stock was in need of recovery and that it required a management strategy to improve the biological status of the stock without impacting needlessly on the economic viability of those who exploit the stock, all in accordance with the tenets of the Common Fisheries Policy.

At that time, the industry members of the NWWAC advocated for stable catch opportunities and recommended a maximum change to the TAC, whereas the members of the Other Interest Groups were not in favour of constraining inter-annual variability if it resulted in fishing mortality rates above F_{MSY} .

Following an ICES benchmark³ of this stock in 2017, the ICES advice for 2018, based on the F_{msy} approach, is for a 40% increase in the TAC. Given the significance of this outcome, the NWWAC has discussed this matter in detail, including: discarding practices in the various involved Member States, the beneficial impacts of Technical Conservation Measures including mesh sizes, gear adaptations for beam trawlers, the protection of well-identified spawning and / or nursery areas, and a scientific evaluation of a proposal by members representing the French industry to increase the MCRS of 7.d Sole to 25 cm. The fishing industry has already taken the initiative to improve the status of the stock by protecting nursery areas along the French coast and increasing the Minimum Conservation Reference Size (MCRS) to 25cm, which has entered into force under national regulation for both the French and the Belgian fleet.

The NWWAC considers that operational stability can contribute to the sustainability objective of this fishery. All members agree that a management plan for this stock would be an advantage and would assist in achieving the MSY objective by 2020 at the latest.

Of primary concern to the NWWAC is the management of the TAC from 2018 to 2020. In this context, the NWWAC has considered the 40% increase advised by ICES and has reviewed a number of possible scenarios, which generate multi-annual stability, with scientific input⁴ from the UK (CEFAS) and France (IFREMER).

¹ [NWWAC Management strategy advice for sole in the Eastern Channel](#) – 8 December 2015

² [NWWAC advice concerning the management of sole in the Eastern Channel](#) – 29 November 2016

³ [ICES 2017 benchmark workshop on the North Sea stock \(WKNSEA 2017\)](#)

⁴ Scientific analyses conducted by Ifremer and CEFAS are available on the [NWWAC website](#)



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On the basis that the recent benchmark for 7.d sole concluded that the stock is in a better state than previously determined, the NWWAC considers that it is appropriate and timely to update its advice on the management strategy for 7.d sole.

It is the conclusion of the NWWAC that the increase in the TAC for 2018 should not be as high as 40%, but should be within the range of 20% to 25%, which is in-line with the latest scientific advice. Whereas the NWWAC acknowledges that there are various sources of uncertainty surrounding the estimates for subsequent years, the NWWAC advises that the TAC should remain similar in 2019 and 2020, provided that F does not exceed F_{msy} and that the SSB is driven towards and above $MSY B_{trigger}$.

In order to achieve this outcome, the NWWAC requests that the European Commission ask STECF to conduct a detailed scientific evaluation of management scenarios for sole in Division 7.d at their Spring meeting, in 2018. This evaluation should include the testing of scenarios to reduce the target fishing mortality in cases where the stock is below $MSY B_{trigger}$, the evaluation of the uncertainties and the risks associated with each scenario and the effects of increasing the MCRS to 25cm.

The outcome of this process would allow the NWWAC to evaluate the risks associated with different management scenarios and to refine its discussion on long-term management options for this stock. The NWWAC is willing to participate in this process and would welcome the opportunity to submit management scenarios for the evaluation by STECF.

In the interim, the NWWAC advises that the TAC for sole in 2019 and in subsequent years is maintained at a level similar to that of the previous year, provided that F does not exceed F_{msy} .

Yours faithfully,



Emiel Brouckaert

Chairman
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