

Dublin, 6th December 2017

Subject: Postponing the proposed increase of the mesh size in Irish Sea *Nephrops* fishery

Dear Mr Machado,

At a recent meeting of the North Western Waters Advisory Council (NWWAC) the technical measures for the Irish Sea fisheries were reviewed. The meeting largely focused on gear modifications to reduce whiting discards in the Irish Sea *Nephrops* fishery, given that whiting has been identified as a high risk choke species¹. Over the last number of decades, both Ireland and the UK have carried out trials with different gear modifications, which have been designed to reduce the capture of unwanted species. These trials have demonstrated that a significant reduction in the unwanted catch of whiting can be achieved and as a result of this work, all vessels operating in the Irish Sea *Nephrops* fishery are using highly selective gears (e.g. 300mm square mesh panel and seltra sorting box).

The NWWAC has been informed that the EC proposes to increase the mesh size in the Irish Sea *Nephrops* fishery to 90mm. Results of trials carried out by Ireland have shown that increasing the codend mesh size to 90mm reduced the weight of the marketable catch of *Nephrops* by up to 20%, due to the small size of *Nephrops* in the Irish Sea. Although these trials recorded a reduction in whiting discards, it is not known if these results were significant, as this was not the main objective of these trials².

On the basis of these preliminary results and taking note of the Commission proposal, the Irish and UK industries agreed at the recent AC meeting to further assess trials with 90mm codend to allow a comprehensive assessment of the likely reductions in unwanted catches and to provide additional information on the losses of marketable *Nephrops*. In parallel with this initiative, trials are also planned to test alternative gear modifications. As far as possible this work would be carried out in the first half of 2018 so that the results could be made available to the NWW Member States Group to allow them to scrutinize the results before the full landing obligation comes into effect on 1st January 2019.

¹ The North Western Waters Choke Species Analysis conducted by the NWW Member States Group and the Member States Group ([link](#))

² Cosgrove *et al.* 2015 Assessment of diamond cod-end mesh size on catch composition in a Celtic Sea *Nephrops* trawl fishery. Irish Sea Fisheries Board (BIM), Fisheries Conservation Report ([link](#)) and Briggs *et al.* 1999. The consequences of an increase in mesh size in the Irish Sea *Nephrops* fishery: an experimental approach. Fisheries research ([link](#))



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On this basis, the NWWAC requests that the Commission consider postponing the increase in the cod-end mesh size in the Irish Sea *Nephrops* fishery until the results of the trials are available. The NWWAC recognizes that there is an urgent need for further management measures that would reduce the mortality of Irish Sea whiting and allow the SSB to increase above $MSY B_{trigger}$. At the same time, the NWWAC highlights that such measures should be evidence-based and subjected to trials under commercial conditions to build confidence with the industry and increase compliance and uptake. Therefore, the NWWAC is keen to continue the dialogue on different options to improve selectivity through technical measures with the NWW Member States Group and the Commission.

Yours faithfully,

Emiel Brouckaert

Chairman
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