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ADVICE

Multi-annual plan for fish stocks in the Western Waters and adjacent waters, and for fisheries exploiting those stocks

19 September 2018

Background

The Commission published its proposal for a multi annual plan for Western Waters (WWMAP), including North Western Waters (COM (2018) 149 final) in March 2018¹. This proposal was developed following a lengthy process including a targeted stakeholder consultation held during 2015. The proposal was presented and discussed at the NWWAC meetings on the 8th March and 3rd July 2018.

The main points highlighted were:

- The proposed MAP covers demersal stocks, including deep-sea stocks, in the Western waters and the fisheries exploiting those stocks.
- The plan covers implementation of the Landing Obligation and technical measures.
- The objective is to ensure the sustainable exploitation of these stocks, by ensuring that they are exploited according to the principles of the CFP (e.g. MSY, ecosystem approach and precautionary approach).
- The plan defines conservation reference points and also includes safeguards and specific conservation measures that should be taken when stocks fall below conservation reference points.
- The WWMAP is currently under negotiation with the Council and European Parliament.

General Comments

The NWWAC welcomes the proposal for a multi-annual plan, the purpose of which is to support the sustainable and practicable management of fish stocks in the NWW. The MAP provides a degree of flexibility in the management of the stocks in NWW through the introduction of F_{MSY} ranges.

The NWWAC notes that the approach in the WWMAP follows closely the North Sea and Baltic MAPs. In this regard there is little value in the NWWAC re-opening issues already dealt with during the negotiations of these plans, in particular regarding the use of F_{MSY} ranges although some NWWAC

¹ COM (2018) 149 - Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a multiannual plan for fish stocks in the Western Waters and adjacent waters, and for fisheries exploiting those stocks, amending Regulation (EU) 2016/1139 establishing a multiannual plan for the Baltic Sea, and repealing Regulations (EC) No 811/2004, (EC) No 2166/2005, (EC) No 388/2006, (EC) 509/2007 and (EC) 1300/2008.



members question the compatibility of F_{MSY} ranges with the achievement of the objectives of the CFP. Additionally the NWWAC is aware that the negotiation of the WWMAP between the Council and European Parliament is quite well progressed and on this basis the NWWAC has chosen to make only a few specific comments at this time.

1. Scope of the WWMAP

The scope of the WWMAP is very wide covering a large area encompassing North Western Waters South Western Waters and CECAF zones around Madeira and the Canary Islands. These areas include a wide range of diverse fisheries and cover most of the demersal stocks, deep-sea stocks and sea bass. By combining the areas and stocks into one plan, it moves away from the regional definitions included in Article 4 paragraph 2 of the Basic Regulation (i.e. there is no differentiation between the NWW and SWW). It also does not acknowledge the differences in the stocks and fisheries considered by the NWWAC and SWWAC.

Furthermore the NWWAC notes there are overlaps for several stocks included in this plan with the NSMAP. For instance, megrim in divisions 4a and 6 and hake in subareas 4, 6, and 7 are included in the WWMAP, whilst other stocks such as haddock and saithe in divisions 4 and 6a, as well as Anglerfish in subareas 4 and 6 are included in the NSMAP. It is not clear what the rationale is for spreading such stocks across different plans and how this will work with regard to regionalisation where there are separate ACs and Member States Groups for the NWW and for the North Sea. It is essential for these straddling stocks that implemented measures are complementary in order to ensure coherent management across adjacent areas.

2. Stocks covered by the WWMAP

It is unclear to the NWWAC which criteria were used to generate the list of stocks in Article 1 of the WWMAP. The list seems rather arbitrary and while the proposal points to “*stocks which determine fishermen’s behaviour and are economically important*”, in reality the list is a mixture of key demersal stocks but also a number of other stocks that are caught purely as bycatch in mixed fisheries. The proposal also indicates that the list contains stocks which can be “managed in line with ranges of F_{MSY} but again for some of the listed stocks ICES does not currently provide F_{MSY} point or range estimates.

Stocks not listed in Article 1(1) are considered in the plan to be bycatch stocks and are to be fished according to the Precautionary Approach as defined in point 8 of Article 4 (1) of the CFP basic regulation. It is not apparent from the proposal what is envisaged but it is important for these bycatch stocks that Article 9(5) of the Basic Regulation and Article 5(3) of the WWMAP guide the measures taken to achieve the objectives of the CFP basic regulation, and to avoid choke situations and premature closures of fisheries.

The NWWAC notes that sea bass in divisions in 4b, 4c, 7a and 7d-h is included in Article 1(1). However, there is no TAC for this stock in any of these ICES divisions and ICES does not provide a F_{MSY} range. Therefore the basis for inclusion in Article 1(1) is unclear to the NWWAC.



3. Implementation of the Landing Obligation and mitigation of choke issues

The NWWAC acknowledges that the WWMAP is an important step in the implementation of the Landing Obligation, particularly with the flexibility in TAC setting afforded by the introduction of F_{MSY} ranges. However, the plan should not be seen as a panacea that will solve all of the outstanding issues with the implementation of the Landing Obligation. In particular, the plan alone will not remove the risk of choke stocks and other management interventions will be required in the future.

4. Technical Measures

The NWWAC stresses the importance of ensuring there is coherence for the MAP in relation to the regionalisation of technical measures as allowed for under Article 7 of the Basic regulation and also in the ongoing negotiations on the proposal for a new technical measures framework². It is vital that the WWMAP works alongside the technical measures framework once adopted. The MAP should also enable the implementation of agreements reached through regionalisation under this framework.

5. Recreational Fisheries

The NWWAC notes the inclusion of a provision in Article 9 of the WWMAP proposal to account for recreational fisheries, in setting fishing opportunities where such fisheries have a significant impact. The AC agrees that this is a sensible approach, but questions the practicality based on the experiences in the Baltic Sea with catches of cod in recreational fisheries. It is essential that when using this provision there is a clear definition of a recreational fishery and the impacts on fishing mortality can be quantified.

² Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the conservation of fishery resources and the protection of marine ecosystems through technical measures, amending Council Regulations (EC) No 1967/2006, (EC) No 1098/2007, (EC) No 1224/2009 and Regulations (EU) No 1343/2011 and (EU) No 1380/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council, and repealing Council Regulations (EC) No 894/97, (EC) No 850/98, (EC) No 2549/2000, (EC) No 254/2002, (EC) No 812/2004 and (EC) No 2187/2005