



CONSEIL CONSULTATIF POUR
LES EAUX OCCIDENTALES
SEPTENTRIONALES

NORTH WESTERN
WATERS
ADVISORY COUNCIL

CONSEJO CONSULTIVO PARA
LAS AGUAS
NOROCCIDENTALES

EU Transparency Register Id. No: 8900132344-29

ADVICE

Celtic Sea Haddock:

An incentivised data collection scheme to improve the management of the stock in the context of the Landing Obligation

25 October 2017

Background

The latest analyses of potential choke species conducted by the NWWAC and the NWW Member States' Regional group, have identified that the capture of haddock represents a significant risk of choking multiple fisheries in the Celtic Sea, once the landing obligation is fully implemented in 2019.

This paper highlights potential data deficiencies that could undermine confidence in the ICES assessment for haddock and presents a case for urgent, remedial action. The mechanism proposed is the provision of a trial which may include a supplementary quota conditional on the implementation of a fully documented catch validation scheme including the verification of fishing operations and overseen by the relevant Member States.

Problem

An apparent misalignment between the TAC for haddock and the spatial and widespread abundance of the species across the main fishing grounds in the Celtic Sea, has generated a high rate of discards of mature haddock¹. Total discards increased in 2016 and are currently above the level of the landings, for the first time, since 2011.

Haddock discards in the fleets operating in these areas are mainly driven by quota shortage in the context of a mixed fishery².

¹ "The TAC has been restrictive in recent years, which has resulted in increased levels of discarding of fish over the minimum conservation reference size (MCRS)." Source : ICES Advice on fishing opportunities, catch, and effort / had.27.7.b-k / 30 June 2017(see [link](#), English only)

² ICES 2016 Report of the Working Group for the Celtic Seas Ecoregion (WGCSE). Figure 7.4.5a Time series of the cumulative scaled length distribution of total catch and the retained catch of haddock in 7b-k.

The STECF discard rates by Member State for the TR1 fleet, which takes over 65% of all catches of haddock, details the annual increase of haddock catches and discards (STECF Database [link](#)) as follows:

Member State	2014	2015	2016
UK	25%	35%	61%
Spain	N/A	57%	N/A
France	26%	29%	55%
Ireland	29%	57%	50%
Overall Discard Rate	26%	38%	55%

N/A = not available

In recent years, the stocks size remained stable, despite a mortality rate above the estimated F_{msy} ³, which suggests that the F_{msy} estimates may need to be reassessed. Observations by fishermen suggest that there has been an expansion in both the stock size and distribution of haddock. Haddock stock appears to have expanded further south and west of its historic distribution. For example, in 2010, anecdotal information from French vessels fishing for anglerfish suggests that this fleet caught less than one tonne of haddock. In 2016 and 2017, similar information sources suggest that these vessels experienced catch rates of approximately 12 to 17 tonnes, with no change in fishing area, pattern or gear configuration.

In addition, the following spatial and temporal gaps in the survey and catch data underpin the ICES haddock assessment:

1. Limited discard data is collected at night when haddock catches are at their peak;
2. The assessment is driven by French and Irish survey data, with a scarcity of data from areas adjacent to the United Kingdom, including areas in which there can be intensive haddock fishing.

Overview of the choke mitigation options for haddock

1. Extensive research trials and development work have taken place assessing various gear adaptations that reduce “unwanted” catches of haddock (e.g.: Celselect; Rejemcelec; DiscardLess, etc.) resulting in fewer catches of haddock below the current MCRS⁴;
2. Increasing the selectivity for mature haddock without undermining the economic viability of fishing businesses through the loss of marketable catch of other species (i.e. both regulated and non-quota species) remains difficult;
3. Spatial avoidance is a limited option because of the widespread abundance of haddock on the main fishing grounds.

³ ICES 2017 Report of the Working Group for the Celtic Seas Ecoregion (WGCSE). Management considerations for haddock in 7b-k.

⁴ ICES 2016 Report of the Working Group for the Celtic Seas Ecoregion (WGCSE). Figure 7.4.5a Time series of the cumulative scaled length distribution of total catch and the retained catch of haddock in 7b-k.

The Landing Obligation

The apparent mismatch between the current TAC and the levels of haddock experienced on the grounds suggests that haddock is likely to become a major choke species for the mixed fisheries in the Celtic Sea, when the species is introduced into the landing obligation in 2019. Discard estimates based on incomplete data, mean that quota top-ups designed to cover fish previously discarded are unlikely to be sufficient to resolve the problem.

For those Member States with no quota allocation, such as Spain, the implementation of the landing obligation presents a specific problem. Species like haddock, for which Spain holds no quota, will essentially choke the fisheries from the start of the year, unless mitigating actions are implemented (e.g. avoidance, provision of quota through swaps, utilisation of *de minimis* exemptions or alternative discard provisions).

Proposal

Given the serious consequences that the capture of haddock under the landing obligation represents for the fisheries in the Celtic Sea, the NWWAC considers that a decisive political intervention is required as a matter of urgency.

Such an intervention should act to:

1. Significantly reduce the unwanted mortality of haddock;
2. Strengthen the quality of the ICES assessment as a basis for setting a TAC that accurately reflects the abundance of the stock;
3. Provide accurate discard estimates to underpin quota adaptations associated with the implementation of the Landing Obligation.

The NWWAC proposes the following combined initiatives to strengthen the knowledge-base for Celtic Sea haddock in preparation for the full implementation of the Landing Obligation in 2019:

The NWWAC proposes the following combined initiatives to strengthen the knowledge-base for Celtic Sea haddock in preparation for the full implementation of the Landing Obligation in 2019:

1. That in setting the TAC for haddock in 2018 in Area 7.b-k every effort is made to:
 - 1.1. Minimise discards as far as possible;
 - 1.2. Follow scientific advice that is based on improved data collection and thus better reflects the observed abundance;
 - 1.3. Consider the ICES scientific advice on mixed fisheries⁵, which reflects the ultra-mixed character of the demersal fisheries in the Celtic Sea, when taking management decisions, in order to ensure the economic and biological sustainability of fisheries;

In addition:

- 1.4. Industry members consider that progress towards F_{msy} should be balanced with significantly reducing discards;
OIG members consider that improved data collection as a basis for TAC-setting, in combination with the minimisation of unwanted catches, as a means to reduce fishing mortality, would facilitate progress towards the F_{msy} requirement of the CFP.
2. That, on the basis of independent scientific advice, the TAC for haddock in the Celtic Sea be supplemented with an additional quota allowance available only to vessels participating in an enhanced data provision and validation scheme, similar to the approach used for fully documented fisheries on cod as agreed in consultations between the European Union and Norway in the North Sea⁶. This would provide validation and full documentation of catch data (including retained and previously discarded length/size compositions).

The supplementary quota would be provided on the basis that:

- 2.1. Careful consideration is given to how it would be allocated across Member States;
- 2.2. It is only made available to vessels participating in the enhanced data collection scheme;
- 2.3. Participating vessels commit to fully documented and verifiable fishing operations, within a scheme overseen and authorised by the relevant member state.
- 2.4. The scheme must not result in any additional fishing mortality, but improves the quality of scientific data underpinning the stock assessment to ensure that the resulting catch advice better reflects fish abundance.

⁵ ICES 2017 Mixed-fisheries advice for divisions 7.b–c and 7.e–k (Celtic Sea). (link in English only)

⁶ <https://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/sites/fisheries/files/docs/body/2016-agreed-record-eu-norway-north-sea-supplement-12-2015.pdf>