

EAPO PROPOSED TECHNICAL MEASURES TO IMPROVE SELECTIVITY OF TOWED GEARS IN THE CELTIC SEA (ICES VIIF&G)

Background

The ICES stock assessment and TAC advice for 2015 for both Cod and Haddock in the Celtic Sea has indicated improved recruitment and strong in coming year classes for both stocks. The Commission has indicated that these juvenile fish should be protected to contribute to higher yields from the stock in the medium to long term.

EAPO agrees that there are significant abundances of incoming year classes of these stocks throughout ICES area VIIf&g and furthermore EAPO agrees that these strong year classes should be protected and allowed to enter the fishery to ensure prudent economic harvesting of these stocks.

It is noted that there has been no formal scientific assessment of the existing selectivity measures that have been introduced by the EU in this area:

- The 'Trevose Closure'
- Regulation 737 of 2012 (which requires the use of either a 100mm or 110mm square panel to be used in TR1 and TR2 gears)

EAPO therefore urgently requests the Commission to seek an assessment of the impacts of these measures by STECF. This information should be fed into the ICES stock assessments and TAC advice for Cod and Haddock.

It is essential that the Commission and The EU Council of Ministers understand that given the positive recruitment trends and broader stock abundance trends in these stocks that if the ICES advice to reduce landings of Cod and Haddock (base on achieving single stock MSY by 2015) is followed it will not contribute to any reduction in fishing mortality for either of these stocks. Instead it will lead to a significant increase in "regulatory discards" i.e. fish that could be sold on the market for human consumption being returned to the sea dead during 2015.

In July of this year the Irish Administration introduced a voluntary initiative which requires vessels to use a 120mm square mesh panel when operating in the Area West of the 8° W (further details of the scheme are included in Annex One)

It is also noted there are a number of ongoing gear trials in different Member States of other gear configurations which may deliver the equivalent or better selectivity patterns as the 120 square mesh panel described above (to be assessed by STECF) for gadoids, without significantly decreasing catches of marketable fish.

EAPO Proposal

That the current voluntary measures put in place by the Irish Administration be extended so as to make them mandatory for all EU vessels operating in that area. It should be noted that over 70% of the haddock landings by Irish vessels come from this area. Therefore a Regulation should be enacted setting out the following:

- In the Area West of the 8° W it will be mandatory for all TR1 and TR2 vessels to utilise a 120 square mesh panel. The text of the regulation should reflect that of 737 of 2012, with changes to area of application and size of square mesh panel.
- In line with Regulation 737 of 2012 vessels with an engine power of less than 112 kilowatts would be given derogation from the requirement to use 120mm square mesh panel and would instead be required to use a panel of 110mm.
- In the Area East of 8° W there will be a continuation of selectivity measures set out in Regulation 737 of 2012 and a continuation of the seasonal 'Trevose Closure' (both of which must be assessed by STECF as a matter of urgency).
- The regulation must contain an explicit and unambiguous provision allowing vessels to use other alternative selectivity measures which have an equivalent or greater selectivity pattern as the 120mm square mesh panel as evaluated by STECF in the applicable area.
- In addition to the above it should be noted that the improvements in selectivity coming from the measures described above will be further enhanced by the fact that the entire French TR1/TR2 fleet (accounting for approximately 70% of gadoids landings for this area) will have to use 120mm square mesh panel (under French national regulation) throughout ICES area VII f&g and the Northern part of ICES area VII j as described in the Regulation 737 of 2012.

Annex One

Information Note

Voluntary selectivity scheme in the Celtic Sea, West of 8° W 2014

Selective Gear

Specifications of the top square mesh panel

1. The panel shall be a rectangular section of netting. The netting shall be single twine. The meshes shall be square meshes, i.e. square-meshed netting shall mean a construction of netting mounted so that of the two sets of parallel lines formed by the mesh bars, one set is parallel to, and the other at right angles to, the longitudinal axis of the net.
2. The mesh size shall be equal or more than 120 millimetres. The length of the panel shall be at least 3 metres except when incorporated into nets towed by vessels of less than 112 kW, when it shall be of at least 2 metres in length.

Location of the panel

3. The square-meshed panel as referred to in paragraph 1 shall be placed into the top panel of the net. The rearmost edge of the square-meshed panel, which is the part closest to the codline, shall be no more than 9 metres from the codline.

Insertion of the panel into net

4. In any net in which a square-meshed panel is inserted in an untapered portion of the net, there shall be at most five open diamond meshes between each panel side and the adjacent selvages of the net.
5. In any net in which a square-meshed panel is inserted, wholly or partially, into a tapered portion of the net there shall be at most five open diamond meshes between the posterior row of meshes in the square-meshed panel and the adjacent selvages of the net.
6. The joining rate between the diamond meshes of the top panel of the codend and the smallest side of the panel shall be at least two meshes to one square mesh for 100 millimetre codends.

