



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

ATLANTIC, OUTERMOST REGIONS AND ARCTIC

FISHERIES CONSERVATION AND CONTROL ATLANTIC AND OUTERMOST REGIONS

Brussels,
MARE.C2/LM/Ares (2015)

Mr Bertie Armstrong
NWWAC Chairman
c/o Bord Iascaigh Mhara
Crofton Road
Dun Laoghaire
Ireland
nwwac@bim.ie

Subject: NWWAC management measures for the Eastern Channel sole stock.

Dear Mr Armstrong,

I make reference to your letter dated 28 November 2014 and my reply dated 13 January 2015 concerning the Eastern Channel sole stock. I would kindly ask you to provide an update regarding the progress made by the North Western Waters Advisory Council in designing a proposal for management measures for this stock.

The measures agreed to by France and Belgium during the Fisheries Council in December 2014 can only be regarded as transitory in the sense that they do not address all the métiers involved in this fishery. Indeed, a third Member State also holds quota for this stock and should also commit to management measures if the dire status of the stock is to be redressed. ICES' preliminary assessment, although subject to possible revision, indicates that landings should decrease by 24% in 2016 which makes the matter only more urgent.

I am aware that discussions are ongoing between French and Belgian fishermen but I would nonetheless urge all stakeholders to work together. In this sense, I believe that the NWWAC provides an ideal forum where all stakeholders and national administrations alike can cooperate meaningfully and design an all-encompassing proposal. The preliminary draft presented by the NWWAC on 23 April last during Working Group 3 definitely requires much more work and time is of the essence. Let us not forget that any proposal will need to be assessed by a scientific body to assess its compatibility with the objectives of the Common Fisheries Policy. To ensure there is sufficient time to examine and if needed amend any proposal, I would urge the NWWAC to seek a timely development.

Ideally, the proposal should be ready by mid-June so that we have enough time to ask the STECF to assess it. Further delays will bring us very close to the December Council and would not allow for serene updates and modifications of the proposal, should the scientists recommend so.

In my view, the ideal process should unfold as below. In how far this agenda matches reality depends very much on how fast the NWWAC is able to progress.

1. Presentation of a NWWAC proposal by mid-June

Given the short delay we are presented with, the proposal should be pre-assessed by relevant national fisheries institute(s) and the STECF plenary would then review the 'pre-cooked' assessments during its July Plenary (6-10 July). Since your next meeting takes place on 7-9 July, this would probably require you resort to a written procedure.

2. Evaluation of the proposal by STECF during the summer plenary

3. Possible update if advised by scientists and re-assessment

4. Possible use of the proposal for the purpose of TAC-setting

If the final proposal is assessed as precautionary by the STECF, your management approach may be used for the purpose of TAC-setting during December Council as we have done in the past for such stakeholders-based proposals.

Should the above not happen, a late assessment risks unavailability of relevant scientific experts: effective assessment requires time and experts may not be available to perform this task as they are always very busy during the last quarter of the year. As I mentioned above, this option would in addition render possible modifications and re-assessment more difficult due to time constraints before the Council takes place.

My team and I are clearly open to discussions and willing to help the process as much as possible. I shall thank you for a quick return and for sharing your views on the matter above.

Yours sincerely,

Bernhard FRIESS

Director

Copies: Jacques Verborgh, Maja Kirchner, Roy Griffin, Evangelia Georgitsi, Emma Hatfield.