



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

The Director-General

Brussels, 1 February 2022
MARE.C5/CR/il/Ares(2022)

Subject: NWW AC advice on addressing Choke Risk in NWW after exemptions

Dear Mr Brouckaert,

Thank you for your email from 9 December in which you share the advice of the North Western Waters Advisory Council on addressing choke risks after exemptions.

We welcome this advice, which provides valuable insight of stakeholders' views on the North Western Waters fisheries, and at the level of the four sea basins therein encompassed (Celtic Sea, West of Scotland, Irish Sea and Channel). I greatly appreciate the work that has gone into preparing it, in particular the constructive approach taken to flag existing challenges as well as examine their causes and set out possible ways of addressing them.

These were elements of major relevance for the discussion on the 2022 fishing opportunities, and they are important in light of the upcoming discussion on the discard plan for 2023, and for discussions about any other technical measure in those areas.

As you rightly point out, this year's scientific advice has unveiled increasing challenges for these sea basins. In the NWW the mixed fisheries nature of the demersal fisheries makes the finding of balances substantially difficult. The elements that you provide us with in your advice, and the discussion held in the working groups of the advisory council, where colleagues from MARE have had the opportunity to participate, are key contributions to build the necessary knowledge to support management decisions. I believe that we have been able to find the right balance and striking good compromises among the three sustainability pillars of the CFP when it comes to the 2022 fishing opportunities.

Mr E. Brouckaert
NWWAC Chairman
Crofton Road c/o BIM Dun Laoghaire
Co. Dublin A96 E5A0
IRELAND
emiel.brouckaert@rederscentrale.be

Commission européenne/Europese Commissie, 1049 Bruxelles/Brussel, BELGIQUE/BELGIË - Tel. +32 22991111
Office: J-99 05/014 - Tel. direct line +32 229-50483

charlina.vitcheva@ec.europa.eu

Without wanting to enter into too much detail, I would like to use the opportunity to share a few general observations:

- Overall, the NWWAC analysis identifies in the Western Waters a total of moderate or high choke risks for 21 out of the 37 stocks listed in the table. These include important and valuable or otherwise iconic fisheries, as Celtic Sea cod or whiting. However, it is also worth highlighting that for 16 of these stocks the choking risk is minimum or non-existent. In addition, it is important to read these results with caution as the analysis has as basis STECF catch data from 2015 and 2016. Since 2016, the catch profiles may have changed as new technical measures have been implemented. We therefore consider that the most recent measures might not yet be well reflected in the results of this analysis.
- I appreciate the list of challenges you highlighted in implementing the landing obligation. I would like to stress the important discussions that are about to begin, including the formulation of the NWW Member States Group Joint Recommendation for the discard plan for 2023, which the advisory council will be consulted on. It is fundamental that these insights are well considered in that process. I note in this regard the recommendation for first assessing the current technical measures in place and their effectiveness in improving selectivity prior to considering additional measures. This is certainly a view the Commission shares. Preventing a choke situation is not necessarily a unique legitimate reason to maintain or introduce an exemption, we should seek alternative approaches when possible.
- In your advice, you refer to the inter-species flexibility as another tool provided by article 15 of the CFP as a mitigation approach to the choking problem. I would like to remind that most of the NWW stock are shared with the United Kingdom and therefore any measures are dependent of discussions and consultations with the other party.
- In this regard, I would like to welcome your reference to the need of creative and innovative solutions when it comes to spatial management, technical measures, and in some cases balancing short- and long-term socio-economic interests. On 29 December the Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2021/2324 amending Regulation (EU) 2019/1241 of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards technical measures for certain demersal and pelagic fisheries in the Celtic Sea, the Irish Sea and the West of Scotland was published. As agreed with the UK the technical measures in these sea basins, and in particular in the Celtic sea, are going to be the subject of discussion with the United Kingdom under the remit of the Specialised Committee for Fisheries (SCF). As pointed out in your advice, several challenging situations remain in the NWW but priority should be given to avoidance measures that aim at unwanted fish not entering the gear in the first place. I could not agree more with this principle. Looking for these measures may require going beyond the norm. Here is where we should all be prepared, if need be, to devise sound approaches and engage in forward looking solutions that help in achieving stock sustainability.
- In your advice, more than once you refer to issues with data availability and data completeness, notably in relation to some pelagic and deep-sea fisheries, highlighting the additional challenge this fact represents since it impedes for example a comprehensive analysis of the choking risk for these groups of species. We are aware of some data problems. We continue working closely with the

Member States to find solution to help overcome these problems. It is certain that the current pandemic situation does not help.

At the same time efforts continue to provide an updated framework to support the EU fisheries data collection policy. I would like to call your attention to the recently approved (13 of January) EU multiannual programme for data collection from 2022 onwards.

- In relation to the ecosystem dimension into the fisheries management, I acknowledge the elements conveyed in the advice. ICES has been including this information in their catch advice sheets and in their ecosystems overviews, notably for the greater Celtic Sea. My services have been following these elements closely, including the outcomes from ICES Working Group WKIRISH. The ecosystem approach to fisheries management is central for the CFP and it is therefore central in the work we develop and implement. We are looking into the optimized format for further development of this discussion, DG MARE seeks to continue to play a key role in it.

I am looking forward to our continued fruitful cooperation. Should you have any further questions on this reply, please contact Ms Pascale COLSON, coordinator of the Advisory Councils (Pascale.COLSON@ec.europa.eu; +32.2.295.62.73), who will forward them to relevant colleagues.

Yours sincerely,

[e-signed]
Charlina VITCHEVA

c.c.: Mr Mathies
mo.mathies@nwwac.ie;
Mrs Vallerani
matilde.vallerani@nwwac.ie;