



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

The Director-General

Brussels
MARE.C.5/NG

Subject: NWWAC letter on climate change implications in the scientific assessment for cod stocks in the Celtic Seas ecoregion

Dear Mr Brouckaert,

Thank you for your letter dated 9 June 2023 regarding the potential impact of climate change on the assessment of the Celtic Sea cod stock.

Your letter raises some important elements on how climate change may affect the productivity and the distribution of fish stocks in response to climate change. We are all concerned about the implications of climate change on the oceans as we are already witnessing alarming increases in ocean temperatures.

The impacts on particular stocks are often unpredictable and difficult to quantify. You point to recent publications that provide clear evidence of the consequences for cod in the Northeast Atlantic. A growing body of evidence also highlights the potential impacts of climate change on the distributional footprint of stocks in the Northeast Atlantic, WKFISHDISH⁽¹⁾ and WKFISHDISH2⁽²⁾. Changes in fish distribution as well as changes in stock productivity presents management challenges that will also need consideration.

As with all stocks, both productivity and sustainability are influenced by fishing pressure and wider environmental factors. Disentangling these is difficult. ICES notes that *“forecasting the consequences of climate change for recruitment and overall productivity of commercially targeted fish stocks remains challenging. To date, there are no examples of where environmental drivers are used to routinely forecast recruitment.”*⁽³⁾

While I acknowledge that the environmental elements affecting Celtic Sea cod may well place negative pressure on stock productivity, the stock has also been subject to excessive fishing pressure for many years. We must provide as much support as possible to aid cod

⁽¹⁾ <https://www.ices.dk/community/groups/Archive%20for%20Community%20pages/WKFISHDISH.aspx>

⁽²⁾ <https://www.ices.dk/community/groups/Pages/WKFISHDISH2.aspx>

⁽³⁾ https://ices-library.figshare.com/articles/report/Celtic_Seas_ecoregion_Ecosystem_Overview/21731615

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recovery and therefore we should continue in our efforts to reduce catches as much as possible.

Regarding the inclusion of climate change considerations in scientific advice on fishing opportunities, I note that ICES has started to question how the influence of climate change on aquaculture, fisheries, and ecosystems should be accounted for in ICES advice (WKCLIMAD ⁽⁴⁾). This is an important step, which has potential implications for fisheries management and our decision making. DG MARE will follow these developments closely.

Once more, thank you and members of the NWWAC for your active involvement and views regarding fisheries management issues. I am looking forward to our continued fruitful cooperation. Should you have any further questions on this reply, please contact Norman Graham, desk officer in MARE C5 (Norman.GRAHAM@ec.europa.eu), or Julia Rubeck, our Advisory Councils coordinator, via the functional mailbox MARE-AC@ec.europa.eu.

Yours faithfully,

Charlina VITCHEVA

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⁽⁴⁾ <https://www.ices.dk/news-and-events/news-archive/news/Pages/WKCLIMAD.aspx>