



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

The Director-General

Brussels
MARE.C.5/SS/vr

Dear Mr Brouckaert and Mr Skau Fisher,

Thank you for your letter of 6 April 2023, by which you seek clarification on the rationale behind the removal of spurdog from the list of prohibited species.

Spurdog is a stock which is now shared bilaterally between the EU and the UK and as such subject to annual consultations on fishing opportunities under the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA)¹. Therefore, it is subject to negotiation with a third country, which the Commission undertakes on behalf of the EU, based on a position endorsed by the Council, and during a process in which relevant stakeholders are consulted.

As recorded in the Written Record of the annual consultations for 2023², the EU and the UK agreed, as part of the consultations, to remove spurdog from the list of prohibited species on the basis of:

- a) the ICES advice³, which after more than 10 years indicated the possibility of reopening the fishery, as well as
- b) NEAFC Recommendation 05 of 2023⁴ which requested this fishery to be managed on the basis of the precautionary approach.

(¹) Trade and Cooperation Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community, of the one part, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, of the other part (*OJ L 149, 30.4.2021, p. 10*).

(²) Written Record of fisheries consultations between the United Kingdom and the European Union for 2023: [EU-UK for 2023 \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eu-uk-trade-cooperation-agreement/consultations/written-record-fisheries-consultations-between-the-united-kingdom-and-the-european-union-for-2023).

(³) ICES (2022): Spurdog (*Squalus acanthias*) in subareas 1–10, 12, and 14 (the Northeast Atlantic and adjacent waters). ICES Advice: Recurrent Advice. Report. <https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.19753588.v1>

(⁴) Recommendation on Conservation and Management Measures for Spurdog (*Squalus acanthias*) in ICES Subareas 1–10, 12 and 14 for 2023 and 2024, [Recommendation-05_Spurdog.pdf \(neafc.org\)](https://www.neafc.org/Recommendation-05_Spurdog.pdf)

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As an additional precautionary measure to deter directed fisheries targeting aggregations of mature females, in order to protect a component of the stock that is particularly vulnerable to fishing mortality, the EU and the UK also agreed to introduce a maximum size of 100 cm for spurdog.

You also enquired whether the STECF recommendation on the application of a decision tree to any potential changes to the list of prohibited species⁵ will be taken into account in fisheries management. I have taken due note of this recommendation, which should however be further developed and seen in the broader context of EU decision making, inter-institutional prerogatives and the international dimension at stake for the management of certain stocks.

Let me assure you that I attach utmost importance to the protection of the most vulnerable species, as also stressed in the recently adopted EU Action Plan “Protecting and restoring marine ecosystems for sustainable and resilient fisheries”⁶, and I fully agree with you that the list of prohibited species is a critical instrument in this sense.

Looking forward to continuing our cooperation and fruitful exchanges,

Yours faithfully,

Charlina VITCHEVA

⁽⁵⁾ STECF-22-08 <https://stecf.jrc.ec.europa.eu/documents/43805/30849320/STECF+22-08+-+Skates+and+rays+management.pdf/f3fc9acf-ac56-4573-a711-b6c57e906dcb>

⁽⁶⁾ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, EU Action Plan: Protecting and restoring marine ecosystems for sustainable and resilient fisheries, COM(2023) 102 final of 21.2.2023 (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52023DC0102>)