



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

The Director-General

Brussels
MARE.C.5/NG

Subject: NWWAC Advice on technical request to ICES on the recovery of the cod stock in the Celtic Sea

Dear Mr Brouckaert, dear Ms Philippe,

Thank you for your letter of 20 December 2024 regarding the NWWAC request to submit a technical request to ICES to assess the feasibility of Celtic Sea cod recovery.

As I noted in my 2023 response ⁽¹⁾, we share deep concerns about the impact of climate change on our oceans, with rising temperatures posing significant challenges. I also referred to the ongoing work by ICES in this regard.

Regarding your request on Celtic Sea cod, it is important to note that this stock is jointly managed with the United Kingdom. Consequently, any discussions on the scientific advice to request from ICES should be discussed in the context of the Specialised Committee for Fisheries. Furthermore, any request to ICES must be jointly agreed and co-financed by both the UK and the EU.

In any event, ICES advice indicates that recruitment in recent years has been weak, a factor already accounted for in the catch advice by using recruitment data from 2015 onwards. As pointed out in my reply in 2023, fishing pressure on this stock remains extremely high and well above any sustainable levels. This, combined with weak recruitment, has resulted in stock biomass remaining critically below safe biological limits.

We rely on ICES' scientific and advisory process to consider all factors affecting the stocks. While environmental changes through climatic change are a factor, ICES acknowledges that *"forecasting the consequences of climate change [...] remains*

⁽¹⁾ ref. Ares(2023)3316168

Mr Emiel Brouckaert
NWWAC Chair
& Ms Alexandra Philippe (upcoming NWWAC Chair)
North Western Waters Advisory Council
Bord Iascaigh Mhara – Ireland's Seafood Development Agency
Crofton Road, Dún Laoghaire
Co. Dublin, A96 E5A0

challenging". However, any associated decline in productivity, such as the recent weak recruitment, will be reflected in the outcomes of the ICES advice.

We are also aware that ICES is currently reviewing its approach to the advice for stocks that are depleted, such as Celtic Sea cod and we are actively engaged in this process via the Meeting between ICES and recipients of ICES, the MIRIA. Given the poor status of Celtic Sea cod, this will likely be candidate stock for such reflections. I would also encourage you to engage with ICES via the Annual Meeting between ICES, Advisory Councils and other Observers (MIACO) to contribute to this discussion.

I also take note of your concerns regarding offshore renewable energy and the designation of Marine Protected Areas. I appreciate your engagement with the relevant national authorities, as it is essential that the NWWAC's perspectives are considered in these discussions.

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 (MARE. C5) (Norman.GRAHAM@ec.europa.eu), or Julia Rubeck, coordinator for the Advisory Councils (Julia.RUBECK@ec.europa.eu), who will forward it to relevant colleagues.

Yours faithfully,

Charlina VITCHEVA

c.c.: CARBALLEIRA FERNANDEZ Eva, HoU C5; KIRCHNER Maja, HoU C1; MAC AOIDH Eoin, Acting HoU D3, DONATELLA Fabrizio, Dir C