

**Report of WG3 (Channel), arising from the meeting in Brussels on 30<sup>th</sup> October 2007, to the Executive Committee of the NWWRAC, on the subjects of Commission proposals for TACs for 2008, in particular for Plaice, Sole and Cod stocks in ICES Areas VII,d,e and on the Council Regulation (EC) No 509/2007 of 7 May 2007 establishing a multi-annual plan for the sustainable exploitation of the stock of sole in the Western Channel**

**Rapporteur: Jim Portus**

**The Executive Committee of the North Western Waters Regional Advisory Council shall consider this report at their meeting on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2007**

## **1. Introduction:**

- This report is concerned with the Commission proposals for TACs for 2008, in particular for Plaice, Sole and Cod stocks in ICES Areas VII d,e.
- This report concerns itself also with Council Regulation (EC) No 509/2007 of 7 May 2007 establishing a multi-annual plan for the sustainable exploitation of the stock of sole in the Western Channel, insofar as “*Article 3, Procedure for setting the Total Allowable Catches*” raises unforeseen questions about fishing opportunities for 2008.

## **2. Regarding ICES advice for TACs and Quotas for 2007:**

**Effort trends:** The WG3 is concerned that ICES has placed too great reliance on graphical representation of “global” effort trends as a proxy for changes in fishing capacity/ mortality. Such graphs do not offer a reliable reflection of changes in fishing activity applied to “TAC and quota” stocks. Over-reliance on such graphs may cause confusion with damaging consequences. Fishing is an economic activity and the constraints of “TACs and quotas” have always been mitigated by fishermen searching for alternative “non-TAC” species. In the Channel mixed-fisheries these are Cuttlefish, Squid, Red Mullet, Gurnard, Black Bream, Lemon soles, etc. WG3 urges that resources be made available, for example through the UK Fisheries-Science Partnership (FSP), to examine more fully the relationships between TAC and non-TAC species in the Channel mixed-fisheries so that the true picture of fishing patterns and especially of effort fluctuations in the fleets emerges.

### **General comment:**

WG3 remembers that “fishing pressure must be reduced but this should be done gradually in order to help preserve jobs.” “The Commission also reaffirms its commitment to improving social and economic impact assessments...”

WG3, therefore, urges the inclusion of a “safety net” for fishing communities adversely affected by decisions that reduce fishing opportunities, especially those that go beyond what is necessary to achieve Fy in a reasonable timeframe.

**Plaice 7d:** Yet again ICES has used “Yield” graphs, based on landings information, as a proxy for the biological state of this stock in the absence of an assessment. As last year, the WG3 must urge that, unless ICES

presents its advice in terms of a TAC tonnage, based on a proper assessment, the Commission should propose a “status-quo” TAC rather than one based on average of recent landings. WG3 is very concerned that unnecessary economic and social damage will otherwise be done that provides no obvious benefit to the stock yet increases the amount of fish discarded.

**Plaice 7e:** WG3 is concerned that the retrospective bias inherent in the Fishing Mortality (downwards) and Biomass (upwards) for this stock is causing much anxiety. ICES assessment states “Due to considerable uncertainty in current estimates of the stock and in recent recruitment estimates it is not possible to provide a short-term forecast.” Under these circumstances and in relation to the combined TAC with the 7d Plaice stock, WG3 must ask that for 2008 the TAC (7d,e) Plaice should be no lower than that set for 2007.

**Sole 7d:** The response of WG3 is to support the advised TAC for 2008.

**Sole 7e:** WG3 strongly supports the concept of a long-term management plan (MAMP) for this stock. However, the potential impact of the strict quantitative interpretation of Article 3 of Council Regulation (EC) No 509/2007, adopted April 2007, is causing great anxiety.

Whilst it is accepted that the long-term target should be a Fishing Mortality corresponding to Maximum Sustainable Yield,  $F_y=0.27$ , the WG3 is very concerned about the social and economic dislocation implied for 2008 by the procedure, in article 3, for setting the TAC.

The text of the Regulation states “that TAC whose application will result in a 20 % reduction in the fishing mortality rate in 2007 compared to the average fishing mortality rate in the years 2003, 2004 and 2005 as most recently estimated by STECF”.

In 2006, ICES WGSSDS (June, July 2006) analysed for the Commission six options to achieve  $F_y$  by “stepwise F reductions in line with latest commission proposals...” The analysis they presented to the Commission clearly shows for each option that the year-one reduction in F would be held for 3 years. This was the approach of earlier drafts of the proposed regulation as considered by the NWWRAC.

WG3 remembers that ICES has expressed views that management plans having multi-annual fishing mortality trajectory should develop without year-on-year re-adjustments. (Baltic Sea Cod)

WG3 is concerned that the “article 3 procedure” adopted earlier this year is not one of those tested by ICES. WG3 urges that “stepwise F reductions” be held for the 3-year steps tested, to enable the industry to

make the necessary structural adjustments in anticipation of the achievement of Fy in the fullness of the planned timetable.

Because of strong retrospective bias in the assessment, Fishing Mortality (downwards) and Biomass (upwards), the use of the adopted Article 3 procedure would lead to a rapid rather than gradual achievement of the target mortality, with inherent upheaval contrary to the objectives of the Common Fisheries Policy.

WG3 remembers that the stock is not in danger of collapse, recruitment is not impaired and industry compliance has already set this stock on a trajectory towards high long-term yield. Furthermore, the physical removal by scrapping of vessels from the UK fleet and the consolidation of opportunities in the remainder must be considered fully.

Now is not the time to hit the industry with cuts that would only result in an increase in discarding and possibly in resurgence of illegal landings.

**7b-k Cod:** The fishing fleets based in ICES Areas 7d and 7e take Cod only as a small, untargeted, bycatch of other operations in a mixed demersal fishery. WG3 is concerned that the assessment process involves great reliance on landings information rather than onboard observations.

The 2005 year-class (7d) and the 2006 year-class (7e) have been noticed increasingly in the 2007 fishery and quantities discarded for reasons of quota-compliance and marketing have risen.

ICES notes, “When a stronger year class enters the stock, the available fishable biomass will increase. If fisheries continue in the same way and landing regulations are restrictive, this could result in increases in discards and unaccounted removals.”

Falling mortality rates (F) and rising biomass (B) are characteristics of both elements of the “Channel” Cod stock. WG3, therefore, urges the Commission to take into consideration these factors and to set a TAC that allows fish of legal size to be kept that otherwise would be discarded.

Finally, WG3 supports the response to the Executive Committee of WG2 (Celtic Sea) in relation to Cod7e-k, the Trevoise Box and its associated measures.

Jim Portus,  
Rapporteur,  
November 2, 2007