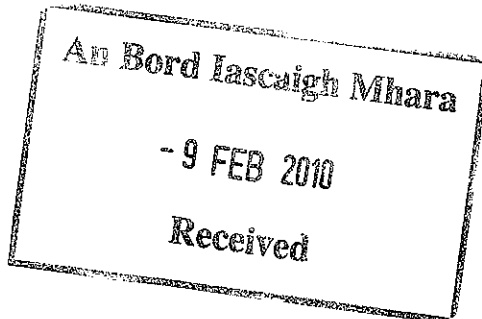




EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL

Brussels, 18.01.2010 D 00660
D (2010)



North Western Waters RAC
Irish Sea Fisheries Board
Crofton Road
Dun Laoghaire
Co. Dublin
Ireland

Subject: Management of Sole in Division VIIe

Dear Mr Lambourn,

I am pleased to reply to the NWWRAC's opinion regarding the stock of VIIe sole.

I share the NWWRAC's concern about the absence of specific advice from ICES and STECF concerning the state of the stock in relation to specific reference points as set in the management plan Council Regulation (EC) No. 509/2007, and for the fishing opportunities for 2010.

I appreciate that the NWWRAC can subscribe to the objectives of long-term sustainable exploitation and management and the use of a fishing mortality rate of 0.27 as a target to achieve that end. I hope that the technical problems presently experienced by ICES and STECF can be resolved in order that this goal can be reached with high confidence.

I agree that the STECF and ICES advice is uncomfortable in management terms, but I believe that management now has to take up its responsibilities and propose action based on the advice that has been provided, without precluding further scientific examination.

The Commission places the highest importance on the implementation of Community legislation. Given the lack of assessment on the recent level of fishing mortality or stock size for VIIe sole this year, the application of the long-term plan according to specific target rates had to be effectively suspended until a new advice is provided. Therefore, setting the fishing opportunities for the stock in 2010 was based on the general objective of the plan, namely ensuring the sustainable exploitation of the stock.

According to the above, as for other stocks falling under 'Category 7', where STECF notes that the state of the stock is not known precisely and advises a reduction in fishing effort, the Commission proposed to reduce the TAC for VIIe sole by 15% and asked STECF to advise on the appropriate level of effort. In the absence of specific advice, a similar reduction in effort as of TAC would logically apply. Following the STECF advice to adopt 'a pragmatic approach to reduce fishing mortality towards the target rate of

F=0.27 through stepwise annual reductions in fishing effort until the target is reached', the December Council reached an agreement to reduce the TAC by 5%. Following the NWWRAC opinion and setting TAC and effort levels in 2010 at the status quo compared to 2009, would not be in accord with the long-term plan's objective.

I am aware of the efforts that have already been made towards achieving sustainable exploitation of this stock. However, while the advice is unclear on specific fishing opportunities, it is very clear that reductions in fishing mortality were necessary. I understand this might be difficult for the fishers concerned with exploiting this stock. I hope nonetheless that you are able to support the Commission concerning these difficult but necessary measures.

Yours sincerely,



Fokion Fotiadis