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DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

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**Subject: NWWRAC and SWWRAC advice on Northern Hake**

Dear Mr. Guerin and Mr. Rodríguez

I would like to provide the SWWRAC and the NWWRAC with the Commission's reply to your joint advice concerning the management of Northern Hake.

I am pleased that we share the same view that maximum sustainable yield is the appropriate objective for the management of this stock, though there are some differences about how to achieve this aim.

In the advice, concern is expressed about the accuracy of some elements of the Commission's non-paper. The fleet segmentation and parameters have been established on the basis of detailed reporting by Member States, either directly or through STECF, ICES and associated research projects. In our non-paper, we summarise the main elements that have been made available insofar as they are relevant for the northern hake and with the collaboration of relevant economic experts. If the RAC has additional information concerning, for example fleet structure, catch composition, incomes and expenditure, then I would invite you to ensure as a priority that this information is made available through Member States's data submissions to STECF.

### *Fishing effort*

I take note of the RAC's position that reductions in fishing effort should be implemented with decommissioning schemes. I welcome this approach, which is consistent with the support package for restructuring that has recently been agreed in the face of the fuel crisis. However, I consider that this approach would need to be supplemented with appropriate adjustments in TAC in order to respect relative stability and to ensure that undue targeting of fishing on northern hake does not develop. Otherwise, there is a risk that more decommissioning takes place than is necessary to meet the objective of the plan.

### *Technical measures*

I also take note that the RAC does not support new marine protected areas to help conserve juvenile hake, nor is there a consensus favouring an increase in mesh sizes to improve the escapement of juvenile hake. However, I am pleased to inform you of the Commission's forthcoming proposals concerning technical measures upon which the RACs are also being consulted.

### *Trawls*

In order to simplify legislation and to standardise the mesh sizes for the main target species in EU waters, the Commission proposes to establish the same mesh sizes for all Nephrops fisheries: 80 mm. In practice the effect of that proposal will be an increase of mesh size from 70mm to 80mm in the Bay of Biscay area. This is important because of the by-catches of undersized hake.

When fishing in the hake boxes the meshes size will stay at 100 mm. This mesh size should also be used outside the hake boxes if significant quantities of hake are made.

We are of course aware that additional technical measures put in place by French authorities including square mesh panels have resulted in a reduction of discards of undersized hake in the range 25 to 30 % and we welcome such initiatives.

### *Gillnets*

Like the RAC, the Commission is also waiting for an advice from STECF on this topic. The outcome will be reflected in our proposals concerning technical measures but will not be included in the hake long-term plan.

### *Rate of adaptation to MSY*

I have considered your advice that adaptations towards MSY should take place by natural wastage of the fleet under unprofitable conditions. However, although market conditions will lead to effort reductions while the fishery is unprofitable, those same mechanisms will lead to re-investment in the fishery as soon the situation shows signs of improvement. This carries the risk of the fishery returning once again to very low profitability. This seems inadvisable and a more proactive and responsible approach is needed, though there is certainly a need to keep our approaches on decommissioning and on long-term management consistent.

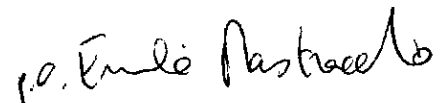
We should plan to manage actively towards targets that will yield high profitability. This means managing fishing opportunities through TACs and other means in accordance with a strategy to rebuild to MSY. In this context, I have taken note of the decommissioning targets that have been discussed in the RACs recently, and this will be factored in when the Commission proposes its long-term plan.

*Control issues*

Your comments concerning the control measures will be considered when our proposal is drafted, in consultation with the relevant experts.

Thank you for writing to me on this topic. Although we have a different approach to some specific issues, I am pleased to see that we share common objectives and I trust a good outcome can be reached on this topic.

Yours sincerely,

  
Fokion Fotiadis