

Proposal for a management plan for the sustainable exploitation of the stock of sole in the Eastern Channel

The June 2014 advice from the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) has indicated that for two subsequent years there have been very low recruitments within the sole stock in ICES Division VIId. Fishing mortality since 2005 has been hovering between F_{pa} (0,4) and F_{lim} (0,55), with an increase in 2013. The SSB was at its highest level in 2012 since 1982, well above $MSY B_{trigger}$, but shows a steep decline in 2013.

At the December Council 2014 the French authorities committed to implementing as of 1 January 2015 a set of management measures aimed at those vessels targeting sole in VIId that include a specific licensing scheme, a 10% reduction in the number of days at sea, the setting of a maximum net length and the closure of four sole nursery areas. The Belgian authorities committed to increasing the mesh size in the lengthening piece from 80 mm to 120 mm for beam trawlers targeting sole in VIId and joined France in closing the four nursery areas.

In line with the data of the ICES June 2014, it is proposed to set as objective of a management plan to keep an SSB forecast above $MSY B_{trigger}$. Focussing on the recruitment issues the following measures are brought forward to achieve this one species management plan objective. In this proposal it is taken into account that under the current CFP the sole VIId stock is likely to become part of a Mixed Fisheries Management Plan.

- Closure of the professional sole fishery January-March in the France and UK 6-mile areas and year-round for recreational sole fishery.
- All beam trawlers operating in VIId have the obligation to have a minimum mesh size of 120 mm in the lengthening piece for minimum 3 metres from the codend.
- Member states to determine the utility of a specific sole VIId licensing scheme.
- Maximum net length to be determined and implemented.

These measures are to be evaluated by STECF with reference to $MSY B_{trigger}$.