

FOCUS GROUP ON SEABASS (FGBass)

Dublin

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Input from the Plateforme de la Petite Pêche Artisanale Française

For the long-liner fleet, 2016 confirmed the catastrophic situation of the seabass resource, both north and south of the 48th parallel.

For long-liners north of the 48th parallel, daily catches are very small with a lot of fish under 42 cm discarded live. Many companies are in a dire economic situation.

For long-liners south of the 48th parallel, 2016 shows a dramatic shift with a major decline in catches, especially north of the Bay of Biscay.

This situation indicates that the 48th parallel delimitation had no biological basis and leads to disastrous consequences. Long-liners operating in the Bay of Biscay have observed a decline of the resource for over ten years. Despite our cries of alarm, nothing was done and in less than three years, we have moved from non-existing management to the threat of a complete moratorium.

Long-liners represent only a small part of the catch, and engage in environmental and resource friendly and extremely selective fishing, promote their fish very well, and still, they are the ones who may disappear!

Concerning the north of the 48th parallel, in 2015, demersal trawlers considerably increased their catches of seabass compared to previous years. Therefore, the ban on pelagic trawls only resulted in a transfer of effort... At the beginning of 2016, a certain number of trawlers ignored the moratorium and landed dozens of tons with impunity. Between January and July 2016, landings of seabass came mostly from demersal trawlers, despite the 6 months moratorium! Therefore, we do not believe that the authorisation of a percentage of by-catch is a wise option, especially if one considers the minor economic dependency of these fleets in relation to this species.

The lack of selectivity and the discards generated by other métiers are also at the core of the problem. Professional organisations have assessed seabass discards by trawlers in the northern area at 50 tons per month between December and April, before the move to 42 cm. Seabass discards, on their own, represent a higher volume than what is caught by the long-liners! Extensive measures aiming at improving the selectivity of trawlers and netters are needed to put an end to this phenomenal waste.

We draw your attention to the consequences of enforcing a complete moratorium for long-liners. For those who are able to do so, the transfer to other species and métiers in the coastal strip would lead to chain reactions on many other fisheries, which are already overloaded (pots, nets, location). Given the very small weight of long-liners in terms of catches, we request that the 2016 management regime be continued for this fleet. We may eventually agree to a decrease of the global catch quota providing this quota is annualised. Lastly, given the disastrous economic situation

of long-liners, we request that emergency economic aid be granted to support businesses encountering difficulties over the coming years.