

EP(17)78

Brussels, 13 December 2017

Fisheries Council adopts better-balanced catch limits in the Atlantic and North Sea for 2018

-For immediate release-

After two-day intensive negotiations, this very morning the Fisheries Council has reached a long-awaited agreement over the fishing opportunities for 2018. Following a particularly conservationist proposal adopted by the European Commission (EC) for certain stocks, Ministers adopted a better-balanced Regulation in light of the socio-economic data provided by Member States. The ambitious agreement will increase the number of stocks fished at Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) levels to 53 next year, compared to only 5 in 2009. The new text also introduces strong measures to improve the state of seabass and eel stocks.

The Council decision sets strict catch limitations for fish stocks in the Atlantic and the North Sea with the objective to achieve MSY levels by 2018 where possible, and by 2020 at the latest. The fishing industry cannot agree more with this approach since whenever the MSY target can be achieved by 2020, the catch limits should not be reduced. This avoids important economic losses for our companies while allowing to make good progress towards sustainable fish stocks and viable fishing opportunities for the industry within the legal time-frame set in the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP).

Following a first analysis of the Council's agreement, the fishing industry can observe that the decision generally follows the EC proposal which is based on the scientific advice provided by the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES). The upward trend in many stocks reflects a huge improvement in management measures and shows the enormous efforts made by the sector. Furthermore, a number of stocks were subjected to top-ups in order to adapt to the incoming landing obligation for all demersal species subject to Total Allowable Catch (TAC) limits.

However, the fishing bodies argue that these flexibilities are far from solving the problem of choke species in mixed fisheries and fishermen from all over Europe are distressed and faced with a high level of uncertainty in the future as a result of the discard ban.

The EU fishing sector welcomes the increases in the North Sea **saithe** by 6%, **monkfish** by 20%, **cod** by 10% and **whiting** by 40%. In contrast, after years of cuts and despite the biomass increase in the North Sea **sole** stock, the Council adopted a cut of 3%. The industry advocated a rollover of the TAC which was in line with MSY ranges. Concerning the **Northern hake**, following an arbitrary proposal from the EC without any scientific basis to reduce the TAC by 13%, the Council followed the MSY approach and decided a cut of 7%.

The sector sees positive results for the North Sea and West Scotland **haddock** TACs which are up by 24% and 26% respectively. Same goes for **cod** in North and South-Western Atlantic waters, where there is an increase of 10% and 9% respectively.

Europêche welcomes the roll-over decision taken over the TAC of the **anglerfish** in Areas VII and VIII and **pollack** in the same areas, since the EC had proposed a 12% decrease for monkfish despite positive trends in both stock sizes and landings.

Moreover, the TAC cuts in areas VII (-10%) and VIII (-10%) for **megrim** do not take into consideration the increase of the spawning stock biomass, and will provoke significant socio-economic losses for the fleets targeting this species.

In the **Kattegat**, there is a significant increase in the TAC for **cod** by 20%, instead of the roll-over proposed by the EC, in view of the positive trend thanks to the huge efforts from fishermen and scientist working in cooperation. However, the TAC for **plaice** will be reduced by 37% in this area.

Concerning the **Southern hake**, we welcome the fact that the final result was not as harsh as the proposal from the Commission (-30%), in cutting the TAC by 12%, ensuring that the MSY level will be reached in 2019. This satisfying outcome is accompanied by a roll-over in **Southern monkfish**.

Quite remarkable is the increase in North Sea **herring** by 25%, contrasting with a poorer performance of the same species in other EU areas. The **horse mackerel** appears to be in a similar situation, since for most areas the Council decided to drop the TAC while increasing it in the Western area and Iberian waters (+21%). **Blue whiting** shows an increase of 4% on an already rather high level, which is comforting for the industry. **Mackerel** is not performing adequately since there are generalised TAC drops (-20%). Still, the coastal states decided rightly to follow the management plan with a TAC constraint of 20%. In general the industry is increasingly worried about the performance of ICES on many of the pelagic stocks, including mackerel.

It is also important to highlight the decision concerning **seabass** to only allow limited fisheries with certain gears in the Celtic Sea, Channel, Irish Sea and southern North Sea, while establishing a two months closure of the fishery to protect the spawning population. Europêche welcomes the more reasonable approach taken by the Council, allowing to continue operating while putting in place measures to allow the rebuilding of the bass stock. However, the problem still remains for those fisheries where incidental catches of seabass occur.

In addition, the Council introduces a ground-breaking prohibition to fish for **European eel** of an overall length of 12 cm or more in Union waters (excluding the Mediterranean), for a continuous period of three months which will be determined by each Member State. Besides, the Council adopted a joint declaration together with the EC committing to adopt measures to further protect the stock. Europêche advocated to maintain the present catch levels in the eel fisheries and strengthen the implementation of the eel management plans in Member States which fail to reach the targets.

President of Europêche, Javier Garat said: *"The results achieved this morning reflect the positive trends for many fish stocks thanks to the numerous efforts made by our fishermen during the last decade. We welcome that these sacrifices are paying off; in fact, two-thirds of the fish stocks will be already exploited at the maximum levels of sustainability for next year. In view of this good progress and the industry commitment to do things right, the EC should not rush towards achieving MSY levels in the short-term at any cost when the CFP clearly provides a flexible timeline to achieve this objective by 2020 without compromising the survival of the EU Fishing fleets."*

Mr Garat concluded: *“The EU must contribute to a fair standard of living for those who depend on fishing activities. In this context, we are appalled and fail to understand why the EU agreed on adopting such dramatic measures against the eel fisheries; even more when no impact assessment on the socio-economic consequences of such a proposal has been carried out. Such a way of acting has a dramatic impact on fishermen heavily dependent on the eel fishery in general and especially on small scale coastal fishermen.”*

Ends

Europêche represents the fisheries sector in Europe. Currently, the Association comprises 14 national organisations of fishing enterprises from the following 10 EU Member States: DE, DK, ES, FR, IT, MT, NL, LV, PL, UK.

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