

Fisheries resources: recovery of the stocks of plaice and sole in the North Sea

2006/0002(CNS) - 11/06/2007 - Final act

PURPOSE: to establish a multiannual plan for the fisheries exploiting the stocks of plaice and sole that inhabit the North Sea.

LEGISLATIVE ACT: Council Regulation (EC) No 676/2007 establishing a multiannual plan for fisheries exploiting stocks of plaice and sole in the North Sea.

CONTENT: the Council adopted a Council Regulation establishing a multi-annual plan for fisheries exploiting the stocks of plaice and sole in the North Sea.

This Regulation will aim at gradually implementing progressively an ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management, and will contribute to efficient fishing activities within an economically viable and competitive fisheries industry, providing a fair standard of living for those who depend on fishing North Sea plaice and sole and taking into account the interests of consumers. The plan will cover all flatfish fisheries having a significant impact on the fishing mortality of the plaice and sole stocks concerned. However, Member States whose quotas for either stock are less than 5 % of the European Community's share of the TAC should be exempted from the provisions of the plan concerning effort management. This plan should be the main instrument for flatfish management in the North Sea, and is expected to contribute to the recovery of other stocks such as cod.

For the purposes of this Regulation, the stocks of plaice and sole shall be deemed to be within safe biological limits in those years in which, according to the opinion of the Scientific, Technical, and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF), all of the following conditions are fulfilled:

- a) the spawning biomass of the stock of plaice exceeds 230 000 tonnes;
- b) the average fishing mortality rate on ages two to six years experienced by the stock of plaice is less than 0.6 per year;
- c) the spawning biomass of the stock of sole exceeds 35 000 tonnes;
- d) the average fishing mortality rate on ages two to six years experienced by the stock of sole is less than 0.4 per year.

The objective of the plan is to ensure, in a first stage, that stocks of plaice and sole in the North Sea are brought within safe biological limits, and in a second stage and after due consideration by the Council on the implementing methods for doing so that those stocks, are exploited on the basis of maximum sustainable yield and under sustainable economic, environmental and social conditions:

- in its first stage, ensure the return of the stocks of plaice and of sole to within safe biological limits. The objective shall be attained by reducing the fishing mortality rate on plaice and sole by 10 % each year, with a maximum TAC variation of 15 % per year until safe biological limits are reached for both stocks;

- in its second stage, ensure the exploitation of the stocks of plaice and sole on the basis of maximum sustainable yield. The objective shall be attained while maintaining the fishing mortality on plaice at a rate equal to or no lower than 0.3 on ages two to six years. The objective shall be attained while maintaining the fishing mortality on sole at a rate equal to or no lower than 0.2 on ages two to six years.

ENTRY INTO FORCE: 09/07/2007.