

Fishery resources: recovery of cod stocks, long-term plan

2008/0063(CNS) - 02/04/2008 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE: to amend the existing cod recovery plan, in order to make it more complete, updated to recent developments, simpler, more efficient and easier to implement, monitor and control.

PROPOSED ACT: Council Regulation.

CONTENT: this proposal aims to amend Council Regulation (EC) No 423/2004, the overall objective of which is to ensure the safe recovery of the cod stocks to the precautionary stock sizes advised by scientists within a time frame of five to ten years. Scientific advice from the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF), based on the advice of the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) has indicated that the reductions arising from the collective effect of total allowable landings (TACs), technical measures (e.g. mesh size, landing compositions, area closures) and complementary effort management regulations have been far from sufficient to reduce fishing mortalities to levels required to allow the cod stocks to rebuild.

The slow progress towards the achievement of the recovery of cod stocks makes it necessary to revise the terms and conditions of the plan. This amendment is justified by the introduction of the following main new elements:

- **the need to revise the objectives:** the current evidence on the effect of global warming makes it necessary to revise long term objectives of recovery plans. Rather than targeting specific biomass levels that may no longer be achievable under changing oceanic conditions, the plan must concentrate on achieving the optimum exploitation rate that will guarantee the highest sustainable yield that the new conditions can provide;
- **the simplification of the effort management system:** a new system, based on effort ceilings to be managed domestically by Member States, is necessary to provide greater simplification of the regulation, more flexibility for Member States, and more efficient implementation;
- **the adaptation of the plan to different levels of recovery:** the plan needs to recognise that when stocks are getting better, more gradual approaches can be applied. For this reason, the amended plan introduces a modular approach, where the adjustment of fishing mortality is a function of the level of recovery achieved;
- **the provision for harvest rules in data-poor situations:** it is necessary to provide clear rules to apply when and where scientists cannot provide precise estimates of stock status;
- **the need to reduce cod discards:** new mechanisms must be introduced, to encourage fishermen to engage in cod-avoidance programmes;
- **the incorporation of the Celtic Sea cod stock:** recent evaluations confirm that this stock is in a similar status of overexploitation as the other cod stocks in Community waters. Thus the need to include it in the recovery plan.

In this context, the control provisions must also be adapted to the new structure and provisions.