Conservation of fishery resources: western stock of Atlantic horse mackerel and the fisheries exploiting that stock. Multi-annual plan

2009/0057(COD) - 21/04/2009 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE: to establish a multi-annual plan for the western stock of Atlantic horse mackerel (Trachurus trachurus) and the fisheries exploiting that stock.

PROPOSED ACT: Council Regulation.

BACKGROUND: in view of the Plan of Implementation adopted at the UN World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002, the European Community is committed inter alia to maintaining or restoring stocks to levels that can produce the maximum sustainable yield with the aim of achieving these goals for depleted stocks on an urgent basis and where possible not later than 2015. Moreover, during the 2002 reform of the Common Fisheries Policy, the Commission and Council agreed to implement multi-annual plans and recovery plans concerning fisheries resources of interest to the Community.

The Western stock of Atlantic horse mackerel is by far the most important of the three horse mackerel stocks which inhabit the Community's continental shelf. The current management system does not serve the horse mackerel situation very well. The biological information on this stock is not sufficient for a full stock assessment that would allow setting a fishing mortality target related to maximum sustainable yield and relate total allowable catches to scientific catch predictions. However, the index of egg abundance which is being calculated since 1977 in triennial international surveys can be used as a biological indicator for the development of the stock size.

Advice from the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) indicates that a harvest control rule based on the trend in egg abundance from the last three egg surveys would provide for sustainable stock management.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT: the Commission considered three options:

- **Option 1**: **no policy change**: continue fixing the fishing possibilities as a yearly ad hoc exercise based on annual scientific advice and political considerations;
- **Option 2**: freezing or gradually reducing fishing pressure in view of the insufficient knowledge about the biological status of the stock;
- **Option 3: management plan**.

The impact assessment concludes that the most suitable option is the one that consists of proposing a long-term **management plan**, which sets TACs stable for three years according to a harvest control rule based on a precautionary advice for the harvest level adjusted by a trend that reflects the tri-annual results of egg surveys.

CONTENT: the plan's objective is to maintain the biomass of western horse mackerel at a level that ensures its sustainable exploitation, and to provide the highest long-term yield. To this end, the harvest control rule should be based in equal parts on precautionary advice given for average recruitment conditions, and on recent total allowable catches adjusted by a factor that reflects the recent trend in the stock abundance as measured through egg production.

The proposal includes a provision for evaluation of management measures each sixth year from the date of entry into force of the Regulation. In view of the revision clause built into the plan, the harvest rule could be adapted to more precise scientific assessments once these are available.

BUDGETARY IMPLICATION: the proposal has no implication for the Community budget.