

Conservation of fishery resources: anchovy stock in the Bay of Biscay and the fisheries exploiting that stock. Long-term plan

2009/0112(COD) - 29/07/2009 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE: to establish a long-term plan for the conservation and management of the stock of anchovy in the Bay of Biscay and the fisheries exploiting that stock.

PROPOSED ACT: Council Regulation.

BACKGROUND: in view of the Implementation Plan adopted at the UN World Summit on Sustainable Development adopted at Johannesburg in 2002, the European Community is committed inter alia to maintain or restore fisheries 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.

The anchovy fishery in Bay of Biscay has been closed since 2005 due to the poor state of that stock. In order to improve the stock of anchovy in the Bay of Biscay, at a level that allows its sustainable exploitation in accordance with maximum sustainable yield, it is necessary to provide for measures for long-term management of the stock ensuring the exploitation of that stock at high yields consistent with maximum sustainable yield and guaranteeing, as far as possible, the stability of the fishery while maintaining a low risk of stock collapse.

It stems from the advice provided by the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) that harvesting a constant proportion of the spawning stock biomass would provide for sustainable stock management. The STECF also advises that the minimum spawning biomass level at which the stock could start to be harvested should be set at 24 000 tonnes and the precautionary biomass levels at 33 000 tonnes. Furthermore, the appropriate harvest rate should be 30% of the spawning stock biomass each year, subject to appropriate restrictions. This rate would minimize the risk of the stock falling below the minimum spawning biomass level, as well as the probability of a fishery closure, while keeping high yields.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT: the Commission considered two main options, including three sub options:

Option 1: no policy change;

Option 2: long-term plan with 3 alternative sub-options

- Rule A: a strategy with relatively higher TAC levels but higher collapse risks;
- Rule B: a strategy with relatively lower TAC levels and lower collapse risks;
- Rule C: a strategy being a compromise between options A and B.

Analysis indicated that a system based on a TAC set mid-year according to the June scientific advice, with a harvest rule establishing the annual TAC level automatically would be the preferred management option for the stock. The system would also include provisions on a closure when biomass is below a certain threshold.

CONTENT: the objective of the plan shall be to maintain the biomass of the stock of anchovy in the Bay of Biscay at a level that allows its sustainable exploitation in accordance with maximum sustainable yield,

on the basis of scientific advice, and while ensuring as much stability and profitability for the fishing sector as is practicable.

The main elements of the new plan are as follows:

The need to set a long-term management plan instead of annual ad hoc measures to set fishing possibilities: the anchovy fishery in the Bay of Biscay is currently closed. In order to re-open the fishery, the Commission agrees with scientific advice and the views expressed by the stakeholders that this should only be done on the basis of a long-term strategy articulated around an appropriate harvesting rule.

Proposal for an appropriate harvest control rule in order to guarantee the stability of the fishery: this long-term plan follows a harvest control rule that should ensure the exploitation of the anchovy at high yields, guarantee the stability of the fishery and have a low risk of stock collapse. Various options regarding possible rules assessed. On the basis of the results of the assessment, the proposal establishes an appropriate rule, according to which annual TACs (Total Allowable Catch) will be calculated.

Strengthening control and enforcement: control provisions must also be incorporated into the long term plan. They should form the basis for a reinforced control regime and thus represent additional requirements to those laid down in the general control system of the Common Fisheries Policy, currently under review. Once the new Control Regulation is adopted, it should overrule the corresponding chapter in this Regulation.

The proposal includes a provision providing for an evaluation of the plan each three years from the date of entry into force of the Regulation.

The proposed plan sets a minimum spawning biomass level based on scientific advice from STECF and ICES, below which the fishery should remain closed.

An evaluation clause is included in the proposal to ensure that this value can be amended, if appropriate in the light of new scientific information and advice.

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