Fisheries resources: recovery of Southern hake and Norway lobster stocks

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In accordance with Council Regulation (EC) No 2166/2005, the Commission presents a report setting out the conclusions relating to the application of the recovery plan for the stocks and the fishing sector concerned, including available socio-economic data linked to the plan.

This report is mainly based on the evaluation study undertaken in October 2010 by the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) sub-group on management objectives and strategies (SGMOS 10-06) and endorsed by the STECF 35th plenary meeting held in November 2010. Other elements, such as recent relevant scientific/technical information by both ICES and the STECF, and the conclusions of a study on the management of the effort regime in EU Member States were also taken into account.

The recovery plan has the objective of bringing the spawning stock biomass of hake above 35000 tonnes by 2015 and to reduce fishing mortality to $F_1 = 0.27$. As regards Norway lobster, the objective is to rebuild the stock to within safe biological limits within a period of 10 years. The main elements of the plan are a 10% annual reduction in F and a 15% constraint on TAC changes between years, following the relevant scientific advice from the STECF () and ICES.

There are indications that **the southern hake and Norway lobster plan has not been effective mainly due to implementation failures**. According to ICES in 2010, after four years following the implementation of the plan in 2006, the fishing mortality rate (F) for hake is nearly three times the target ($F_{max} = 0.27$). In this context, the TACs for hake have not been fully enforced. Landings in 2010 are estimated by ICES scientists to exceed the TAC by 2.2 times. As the recruitment seen in 2007 was unusually high, this represents a missed opportunity to rebuild

the hake stock to a sustainable level within the foreseen timeframe. In case recruitment declines again to previously observed levels, a longer transitional period or steeper reduction in catches to achieve F_{msy} by 2015 will be necessary.

The **effort regime has not been effective in reducing fishing pressure on both stocks**. Whilst nominal fishing effort for the regulated gears under the plan has declined, effective effort increased mainly due to both effort transfers to gears that catch more hake per unit effort and to a significant number of vessels not being subject to effort restrictions. The effort exerted on Norway lobster stocks has been partially reduced due to a shift of effort to the shrimps' fishery rather than as a result of effort reductions imposed by the plan itself.

The lack of implementation of the plan during the period 2006-2010 reduced the net present profits by 20% relative to a scenario where the plan would be fully implemented since 2006. In order to have a better understanding of the economic consequences of the plan, it would be necessary to analyse it more in context, notably taking into account the other species caught by the relevant fleets in the same or different fisheries.

In the context of a possible revision of the plan in 2011, the current failure to achieve the target reduction of fishing mortality needs to be addressed. Besides implementation issues that need to be urgently resolved, **the effort regime must also be improved**. It is appropriate to introduce an effort regime that takes account of the fleet segments engaged in the fishery, whether with active or passive gears, and

possibly enlarge the application of the effort regime to the Gulf of Cadiz and to smaller vessels. Discard practices need to be thoroughly assessed to quantify its impact on fishing mortality. The introduction of seasonal and real-time closures would also be an effective means to control fishing pressure, in particular on spawning grounds. The management of the Norway lobster stocks by FU (Functional Unit) would better respond to the conservation measures required for each stock unit. The inclusion of other species such as anglerfish in the plan would be appropriate to minimise the impact of this mixed fishery on certain other stocks. The objective of the plan may be revised in light of the most recent scientific advice.