Conservation of fishery resources : rebuilding stocks of cod and hake in Community and adjacent waters

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PURPOSE : to rebuild stocks of cod and hake in Community and adjacent waters. CONTENT : on 14-15 December 2000, the Commission was invited to submit proposals for multiannual recovery plans for relevant stocks of cod and hake. This Communication presents the objectives of and main instruments to be used in the recovery plans, summarises the conservation measures either already in place or soon to be adopted and outlines the approach which the Commission intends to follow in its preparation of formal proposals which will be presented before the end of 2001. For many years, proposals by the Commission for TACs intended to reduce fishing mortality rate on both cod and hake have not been acceptable to Council. In more recent years, especially for cod, Total Allowable Catches (TAC's) intended to reduce fishing mortality rate have been accepted by Council but for hake there has been opposition to accepting such TACs. In brief, the fishing pressure on these stocks and catches of small, juvenile individuals, many of which are discarded, are too high. Both of these factors have resulted in an erosion of the quantities of mature fish (spawning stock biomass) to the extent that there is a high probability that the stocks are no longer able to replenish themselves by reproduction. The recovery plans will take into account the need for an ecosystem-based approach. They will also respect the Community's international commitments and, in particular, they will be consistent with the FAO Code of Conduct for responsible Fishing and with the 1997 Statement of Conclusions of the Intermediate Ministerial Meeting relative to the North Sea Conference, including the application of the precautionary principle. The objective of the recovery plans is to restore spawning stock biomass to levels considered by science to provide a high probability that replenishment of the stocks is not threatened. The only means open to management to achieve this objective is to moderate the activities of fishermen in such a way that the fishing mortality rate on cod and /or hake is substantially reduced. For the duration of the recovery plans the fishing mortality of adult fish will have to be reduced to very much lower than the current high mortalities. Furthermore, reduction in fishing mortality rate for cod and hake cannot be achieved unless reduction in fishing mortality rate for species caught in association with cod/hake is also accepted. These species include haddock, whiting, plaice, sole, anglerfish and megrim. Lastly, the Commission intends to table legislative proposals for Council decision on a definite hake and cod recovery plan by November 2001. This timing will allow further scientific advice to be obtained from ICES and the STECF and the results of current trials of selectivity devices for certain fishing gears to be taken into account.