Conservation of resources: specific access requirements to fishing for deep-sea stocks

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PURPOSE : to establish specific access requirements and associated conditions applicable to fishing for deep-sea stocks. CONTENT : deep-sea stocks are fish stocks caught in waters beyond the main fishing grounds of continental shelves. They are distributed on the continental slopes or around sea mounts. These species are slow-growing and particularly vulnerable to overexploitation. As fisheries for these species have developed in recent years, it is necessary to establish a management system to ensure that their exploitation is sustainable. Scientific advice from ICES (International Council for the Exploration of the Sea) and endorsed by STECF (Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries) indicates that the most appropriate conservation measures for these species would be based on effort limitation and, in certain cases, reduction. This proposal introduces elements of a system for the management of fishing effort directed at deep-sea species. It also includes elements for the collection of data in support of scientific assessment and appropriate management. Under this proposal, fishing effort will be limited to recent levels and improved data will be made available for scientific assessment. The Commission intends to propose further elements of an effort management system as required by scientific advice in due course. The proposal is complemented by a separate Commission proposal to restrict catches by means of quota management. At the Fisheries Council of 14-15 December 2000, the Council and the Commission adopted a declaration whereby the Commission was invited to propose catch limitations for these stocks and also other measures as appropriate. Member States also undertook appropriate steps to stabilise fishing effort on deep-water species to no more than the level of recent years. The proposed measures are consistent with those commitments. As is the case for the imposition of TACs and quotas and due to the urgent requirements for conservation of these species it is desirable that the Community implement these measures unilaterally whilst seeking agreement on harmonised measures within the relevant regional fisheries organisation (the North-East Atlantic Fisheries Commission). The measures in this proposed regulation cover a greater range of species and a wider geographic area than the measures envisaged in the existing arrangements for the management of fishing effort (Council Regulations 685/95 and 2027/95). At a later stage, the Commission may present a proposal to revise the limitations on fishing effort directed at deep-sea species in those regulations.