

Conservation of fish resources: recovery of the Northern hake stock

2003/0137(CNS) - 27/06/2003 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE : to establish measures for the recovery of the Northern hake stock. **CONTENT** : the overall objective of the proposal is to ensure the safe recovery of the stock to the precautionary stock sizes advised by scientists within a timeframe of five to ten years. The proposal is written as five chapters: - Chapter 1 : sets out the area covered, which is occupied by Northern hake stock. This comprises Community waters of the North Sea, Skaggeak and Kattegat, West of Scotland, the Channel, the Irish Sea, Celtic Sea, West of Ireland and Bay of Biscay. - Chapter II : sets the target levels. The aim is to increase the quantities of mature fish of the Northern hake stock to values equal to or greater than 143000 tonnes. If for two consecutive years the target level for the Northern hake stock has been reached, the council will decide to replace the recovery plan with a management plan by qualified majority voting. - Chapter III : if the stock is equal to or above 103000 tonnes, a Total Allowable Catch (TAC) will be set. The procedure for setting the TAC is laid out in this Chapter. The TAC will be set so as to aim for a 10% increase in stock size in the following year. If, however, the estimated stock size is well below the minimum level then more severe measures are proposed. The chapter also sets out the details of the principle that the largest annual change, upwards or downwards, in any TAC from one year to the next should not be greater than 15% after the first year of implementation of a recovery plan. These rules on the setting of TACs will be subject to the condition that the precautionary fishing mortality rates recommended by scientists should not be exceeded. The fishing mortality rate must not be greater than 0.24. - Chapter IV : contains the Commission's proposals for the management of a fishing effort limitation scheme - i.e. restricting the time that the fishing vessels concerned may spend fishing to correspond to TACs. For the Northern hake stock, the effort scheme will cover only those areas in which the majority of the stock resides, namely the West of Ireland, Celtic Sea, Bay of Biscay and Western Channel. In simple terms, the system works as follows: - first the overall historical fishing effort of all vessels catching northern hake is calculated; - then the reduction in fishing effort required to match the selected TAC is determined; - this reduction is distributed across Member States in proportion to how much Northern hake they have landed during the reference period in comparison to the total Community landings. These effort limits, expressed in kilowatt-days, will be distributed among their vessels by Member States, within the geographical area to which they apply. The kilowatt-days will be fully transferable and usable within that area at any time throughout the year. - Chapter V : provides for measures in relation to improved monitoring, inspection and control for the vessels covered by the effort management system. These measures include details of prior notification, the requirement to land northern hake in designated ports and stowage and transport conditions. The rules on VMS have been removed since the last proposal, since they will be addressed in a new Regulation. Technical conservation measures have not been included in this regulation, but the Commission may come up with proposals at a later date. It should be noted that, although no direct reference is made in this Regulation, there will be consequences for TACs in relation to other species associated with Northern hake. This proposal replaces the provisions set out in the revised proposal for a Council Regulation establishing measures for the recovery of cod and Northern hake stocks (refer to CNS/2001/0299).