

Fisheries resources: recovery of the sole stocks in the Western Channel and the Bay of Biscay

2003/0327(CNS) - 23/12/2003 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE : to establish measures for the recovery of sole stocks in the Western Channel and the Bay of Biscay. **PROPOSED ACT** : Council Regulation. **CONTENT** : there are two sole stocks covered by this proposal, namely the stock in the western Channel (ICES Division VIIe) and the stock in the Bay of Biscay (ICES Divisions VIII a and b). The objective of this recovery plan is to ensure the recovery of the stocks to within safe biological limits within a time frame of five to ten years. The proposal is written in five chapters, and the key details are as follows: - the proposal sets out for each sole stock what the maximum fishing mortality rate should be to ensure their recovery within the time frame. Total allowable catches will then be calculated based on these; - the Bay of Biscay stock is probably around 10000 tonnes, having declined by approximately one third since 1995. Fishing mortality has been above F_{lim} , the fishing mortality at which it is thought that the stock could collapse, since 1997. The western Channel stock has been declining since 1980 and is now estimated to be at its historically lowest level, probably around 2000 tonnes. Fishing mortality has been mostly above F_{lim} since 1982. Scientists have indicated that while the estimated relative developments in stock sizes are very accurate the estimates of the absolute sizes of the stocks are very uncertain. Therefore, biomass reference points should not be used as targets for recovery. The recovery targets should instead be expressed in terms of fishing mortality rates. The fishing mortality reference point $F_{0.1}$, which is based on yield-per-recruit criteria and therefore robust to changes in absolute estimates of stock size, has been chosen as the recovery limit. $F_{0.1}$ is sufficiently low to give, if achieved, a high probability of recovery; - the target mortality rates will be achieved by reducing the fishing mortality rates gradually over time and setting TACs consistent with them such that recovery is likely to be achieved within the same time scale as that proposed for the cod recovery plans, namely around five to ten years. In any case, $F_{0.1}$ is a limit, not a target. This means that recovery can be achieved, and the recovery plan replaced by a management plan, when the stocks are considered to be within safe biological limits, regardless of whether the limit of $F_{0.1}$ has been reached; - the long term yield per recruit when fishing at $F_{0.1}$ is close to the maximum yield, and although the reduction in the fishing mortality towards $F_{0.1}$ will result in a short term decline in yield, the yield is expected to increase in the medium to long term; - the proposal also elaborates 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. In the first year, these limits are increased to 25% to allow for a possible higher first recovery step; - the draft regulation gives details of the management of a fishing effort limitation scheme - i.e. restricting the time that the fishing vessels concerned may spend fishing to correspond with the TAC's. The system is the same as proposed in the cod recovery plan, giving flexibility to Member States in management and allocation of fishing effort to individual fishing vessels. These sole stocks are, however, also found within the area covered by the proposal on the recovery of northern hake and the effort limitation measures proposed for the hake may therefore contribute to sole recovery. To avoid making the management systems too complicated, the effort management for sole will include only those vessels fishing for sole and having landed more sole than hake. Vessels having landed more hake than sole will be covered by the effort scheme for hake. The system will work as follows: - first, the overall fishing effort over a three-year reference period of all vessels catching sole not covered by the northern hake plan is calculated; - then the reduction in fishing effort, relative to the effort in the reference period, required to match the selected TAC is calculated and allocated to Member States in proportion to each Member State's share of the total landings of sole and taking into account differences in catchability. Member States will distribute these effort limits, expressed in kilowatt-days, within - but not between - the geographical areas occupied by the respective sole stocks. They will be fully transferable between the vessels and usable at any time throughout the year; - there are measures for 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 sole in designated ports and stowage and transport conditions. Technical conservation measures have not been included in this regulation.