

Fisheries resources: recovery of Southern hake and Norway lobster stocks

2003/0318(CNS) - 23/12/2003 - Document attached to the procedure

COMMISSION'S IMPACT ASSESSMENT

For further information regarding the context of this issue, please refer to the summary of the Commission's initial proposal for a Regulation establishing measures for the recovery of the Southern hake stock and the Norway lobster stocks in the Cantabrian Sea and Western Iberian waters (ICES divisions VIIIc and IXa) - COM(2003) 818 final.

1- POLICY OPTIONS AND IMPACTS: Given the endangered status of the Southern hake and Norway lobster stocks, and given that TAC and technical measures (mesh sizes, minimum landing sizes, etc) alone have not been sufficient to protect these stocks, there is *no alternative* than reinforcing existing measures with a reduction of the fishing effort (i.e. of the number of fishing days) as well as the catches of the vessels catching them. There are, however, questions as to the **timeframe** over which the recovery of these stocks should take place since the negative impacts of these reductions could be felt over a number of years.

Comparing various alternatives would require complex bio-economic simulations taking into account the dynamics of stock recovery which are way beyond the remit of this assessment. Furthermore, the heterogeneity of the fleet concerned and the lack of detailed information on their economic performances would not allow for a detailed economic comparison of such options. Therefore, the *only alternative policy option* to which this proposal could be compared with, is that of keeping the existing policy, thus of running the very serious risk of a complete collapse of the relevant fisheries within the short to medium term, with disastrous socio-economic consequences, as illustrated by the closure of the cod fishery in Newfoundland.

IMPACTS :

Fishing fleets likely to be affected are: Fishery fleets based in Spain, Portugal and France are likely to be affected by this proposal. These include: Spanish bottom trawlers (bakka), certain Spanish pair trawlers, certain Spanish small-scale coastal fishery, Spanish vessels participating in mixed demersal fisheries off the Gulf of Cadiz, Portuguese mixed fishery (except in Sesimbra), Portuguese vessels with a special licence to catch Norway lobster, either with trawls or with pots and French vessels, mostly trawlers, gill-netters and, to a smaller extent, longliners, registered in the administrative area of Bayonne. It is thus clear that the number of fleets likely to be affected by these measures is quite high and that they are extremely heterogeneous in terms of capacity and crew size.

Socio-economic impacts: To comply with the proposed new measures, the fishing vessels concerned will have to reduce the number of fishing days they can catch S. hake and N. lobster in the designated areas, and their catches thereof. Thus, they will have to adapt their fishing practices either by stopping fishing altogether for a number of days, or by moving to fishing grounds outside the designated areas and/or by switching to fishing gear which would generate no by-catches of S. hake and N. lobster. In addition, for control purposes, fishermen will have to store separately their catches from recovery stocks which will generate some additional work, and practical difficulties on-board vessels with insufficient storage facilities (especially smaller-scale fishing vessels).

The proposed measures will thus affect a range of stake holders, first and foremost the catching sector (fishermen, whether deck hands, officers or skippers, and vessels owners), and, to a lesser extent, the ancillary activities including the seafood trade and the processing industries (depending on their degree of reliance on local supplies and the availability of alternative/competing supply sources) as well as some of the input supplying industries (shipyards, shipchandlers, etc).

Mid and long term impacts of the rebuilding of the stocks: Available biological evidence suggests that the short term reduction in the value of the landings, should be compensated for when considering the cumulative value of these catches over the mid term (5 to 10 years), because the benefit of sparing younger age classes of S. hake will be rapidly obvious.

Environmental impacts: Since the regulation will result in a decrease of fishing pressure of the fleets operating in the designated areas, it should have a positive effect for the target species, as well as for other commercial and non-commercial species which are caught with the recovery species. Also, given that some of the fishing operations are realised with heavy towed gear which produces large alterations in the bottom communities and habitats, it is expected that these alterations will be substantially reduced, especially in where fishing for N. lobster will be restricted or forbidden. This should contribute to rebuilding of biodiversity.

Impacts outside the European Union: It is not expected that this proposal would have significant impacts outside the Union, either on the candidate countries and/or other countries (external impacts) given that the stocks concerned are not shared with non European countries. Indirect effects due to the transfer of fishing effort to alternative fishing grounds in Moroccan waters are also unlikely since the termination of the relevant EU fisheries agreement, although some entrepreneurs may be able to negotiate private access for a fee. Lastly, some of the vessels scrapped from the EU fleet may be definitively exported to third countries thus contributing to the renewal of the local fishing fleets.

2- FOLLOW-UP : The essential task of the competent authorities of the Member States is likely to consist of determining the historical rights of the vessels which have harvested recovery stocks in the designated area over the reference period, and more importantly in finding a system to allocate the corresponding reductions in fishing effort. Member States are given full leeway for establishing these schemes according to what is considered at a national or sub-national level, as the most appropriate way to achieve the proposed catch and effort reductions. Criteria on which they may establish such schemes include their detailed knowledge of the relevant fisheries, existing structures and fisheries organisations, cost efficiency, regional development objectives, etc.