

Conservation of fishery resources: stock of cod in the Baltic Sea, multi-annual plan

2006/0134(CNS) - 24/07/2006 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE : to propose a multi-annual plan to rebuild Baltic cod stocks.

PROPOSED ACT : Council Regulation.

CONTENT : the Commission is proposing to establish a multi-annual plan for the long-term management of the fisheries on the cod stocks in the Baltic Sea to ensure that the exploitation of Baltic cod stocks is in conformity with the overall objective of the Common Fisheries Policy of providing sustainable economic, environmental and social conditions. This multi-annual plan for Baltic cod has been developed through extensive consultation with stakeholders and with the Member States concerned. This is one of a series of long-term plans developed by the Commission to help re-establish European fisheries on a basis which is at once biologically sound, economically profitable and socially sustainable.

More specifically, the Commission is proposing targets of fishing mortality rates of 0.6 for Western Baltic cod and 0.3 for Eastern Baltic cod. These are designed so as to be sufficiently low to allow the rebuilding of the stocks to sustainable levels while being sufficiently high to ensure high yields for fishermen. A revision clause is included so that minimum mortality rates can be amended in the light of new scientific advice.

Total Allowable Catches (TACs) would be set so as to reduce fishing mortality from current rates by 10% a year until the target rate for each stock is reached. It would, however, be possible to have greater reductions if the state of the stock concerned required it. At the same time, some degree of stability will be guaranteed for the industry by capping annual variations in TACs so that they can neither be reduced nor increased by more than 15% year-on-year. It should be noted that constant or declining fishing mortality on a stock that is growing rapidly can lead to rising TACs. Initial TACs for both stocks will be decided by Council next October, as part of the Baltic TACs and quotas regulation for 2007. The TACs and quotas for 2006 and effort management measures for 2006 were already set with this plan in mind.

An effort limitation scheme will also be set up with the aim of reducing fishing effort by 10% each year until the target fishing mortality rate has been achieved. The scheme will be based on the existing summer ban. This ban closes all fishing for cod with nets larger than 90mm and with bottom set lines for two months in the western Baltic (15 March to 14 May) and for three months in the eastern Baltic (15 June to 14 September). The number of remaining days will then be reduced by 10% each year until such time as the fishing mortality targets for the stocks have been reached. This additional reduction can be implemented in a number of different ways. Additional control measures are included in the proposal, which will be crucial to ensuring its success.

A special derogation to the closed periods under this scheme is available for small-scale coastal fisheries, where boats of less than 12 metres in length will be authorised to retain on board and land up to 10% of cod by live weight caught by gillnets, entangling nets or trammel nets with mesh size of 110 mm or more. In addition, the fishing days allocated to Member States will be increased in proportion to any permanent reductions in fishing effort achieved, whether through permanent cessation of fishing activities or through the definitive withdrawal of vessels from the fishing area concerned.