

Fisheries resources: recovery of the stocks of plaice and sole in the North Sea

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The Council held an exchange of views on a proposal for a regulation aimed at establishing a management plan for fisheries exploiting stocks of plaice and sole in the North Sea, with a view to facilitating the incoming presidency to take work forward.

The Council agreed on the following joint statement by the Council and the Commission on this plan to be entered into the minutes of the Council meeting:

"The Council and the Commission agreed on the following outline for a 2-stage multi-annual plan for North Sea plaice and sole in order to facilitate its adoption as early as possible in 2007.

The first stage shall provide for an automatic reduction of fishing mortality of 10% with a maximum TAC variation of 15% per year until safe biological levels are reached for both stocks. The plan will establish initial long term objectives. Once safe biological levels have been reached and having completed an impact assessment, a definitive decision shall be taken on quantitative long-term reference points on the basis of Maximum Sustainable Yield. These references will guide fishing management for the two stocks during the second stage.

Effort management shall restrict fisheries in order to ensure no captures beyond the TAC. It shall, at the same time, be sufficient to catch the TAC allowed on the basis of the fishing mortality rates established in the plan where this can be done without increasing the fishing effort above the level allocated in 2006.

Effort management within this multi-annual plan will cover all flatfish fisheries having a significant impact on the fishing mortality of the flatfish, however, Member States that have been less than 5% of the TACs of plaice and sole shall be exempted from the effort management regime.

Control and enforcement shall be proportional to the status of the multi-annual plan.

In the context of the revision of the technical measures during 2007, attention will be given to ways to improve the selectivity of gears targeting flatfish, including the 80 mm beam trawl. This plan shall be the main instrument for flatfish management on the North Sea, and will contribute to the recovery of other stocks such as cod".