



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL

Brussels,
D(2010)

Mr Reine J. Johansson
Baltic Sea RAC
H.C. Andersens Boulevard 37
DK-1553 Copenhagen

Subject **BS RAC recommendations for the fishery in 2011 and comments on the Commission's Communication on fishing opportunities for 2011**

Dear Mr Johansson,

Thank you for your letter of 30 June 2010 and for the BS RAC's recommendations on the fishing opportunities for 2011, and for your subsequent letter of 6 July dealing specifically with western Baltic herring.

Timing of the proposal

The BS RAC reiterates its discontent with the timing of the TAC setting process. I agree that this is something that we should endeavour to improve. I will certainly ask ICES to explore the possibility of delivering the advice on western Baltic herring along with the advice on the rest of the Baltic stocks at the end of May.

This would still mean that the RAC would have only 4 weeks to consider the advice before delivering its recommendations. I note your statement that this does not provide an even playing field amongst the RACs, though I am rather puzzled by implication that there is an element of competition involved. I would also suggest that the other RACs do not have significantly more time to prepare their response, given that the ICES advice for the stocks of interest to them is delivered one month later, and just before the summer break.

I am reluctant to agree with your proposal to delay the proposal for the Baltic fishing opportunities until the November Council, but I will give the idea further consideration. My concern is the risk of crowding too many proposals into the last two Councils of the year, especially for those years where the Council also has to decide on the bi-annual regulation for deep sea species.

Cod

I appreciate the BS RACs support for the fixing of the TACs for the two cod stocks at the levels that are indicated by the long-term plan.

I have taken note of your concerns about some aspects of the plan. Some are technical questions regarding the assessment and the rationale for establishing the reference points, and are rightly directed to ICES. Others concern the provisions of the plan itself, including the implications of the progressive effort reductions as we move towards Fmsy, and the call for derogations from the regime for gill netters.

I will not enter into a detailed discussion of these issues now, but I would like to assure you that I do take your concerns very seriously. As you know, the introduction of any changes to the plan now requires a co-decision procedure, which is potentially very time-consuming. I therefore suggest that we address these and other concerns in the context of the forthcoming evaluation and revision of the plan. The STECF will evaluate the performance of the plan in October. I will ensure that my services communicate your concerns to the STECF so that they can be taken into account as part of the evaluation, and I would invite the BSRAC to communicate in good time any other issues that they would like the STECF to consider.

Flatfish

The STECF confirms that the plaice stock in the Baltic falls into category 11 set out in the Annex to the Commission's Communication on fishing opportunities. However, this does not mean that the TAC for 2011 will be automatically reduced to recent catch levels. When proposing the TAC levels for category 11 stocks, the Commission takes into account any complementary information that is available, including the quota uptakes by individual Member States. Whilst I can't anticipate the content of the proposal, the Commission will carefully consider the advice of the BS RAC that there should be a rollover of the current TAC for 2011.

Salmon

The ICES advice for salmon in the main basin is for a TAC of 120,000 individuals to ensure stock recovery, compared to the 2009 TAC of 310,000. This advice is endorsed by the STECF, which however notes that the stock is classified as a category 6 of the Communication on fishing opportunities, and that the TAC reduction is therefore constrained to 15%. I take note of the BS RAC request for a rollover of the 2010 TAC, but I must say very frankly that this would be very difficult to justify in the circumstances.

The stock of salmon in the Gulf of Finland is also a category 6 stock. Here I would repeat the comments I made for category 11 stocks. The Commission will take into account any information that would suggest a rollover would be more appropriate than a reduction in the TAC. Your recommendation that this should be the case here will be very seriously considered.

Pelagic stocks

I note the recommendations of the BS RAC concerning the pelagic TACs, and I particularly appreciate the transparent way in which divergent views within the RAC have been reflected in the report. I cannot anticipate the content of our proposal, but I will repeat my assurance that the points expressed in your document will be carefully considered.

I would like to single out the western Baltic herring for a rather more detailed response. This was the subject of a separate letter from the BS RAC, because the advice was delivered one month later.


The STECF advice for the western Baltic herring stock, which falls under category 3 of the Communication on fishing Opportunities, is for a reduction in the TAC of about 30%. One of the difficulties of achieving the recommended reductions in catches of this stock relates to the fishery in the Skagerrak, where it mixes with North Sea autumn spawners. Traditionally, the recommended TAC has been split 50:50 between the Skagerrak and the Baltic, though this does not reflect the real distribution of catches which are mainly taken in the Skagerrak. As you correctly state, applying such a split to the advised catch would imply a 4% reduction in the TAC in the Baltic. This means that a much bigger reduction than 30% would be required in the Skagerrak to achieve the overall 30% reduction.

As you know, the TAC in the Skagerrak must be agreed with Norway, because of the mixing with the North Sea stock. Norway is very unlikely to agree to a TAC reduction sufficiently large to protect the western Baltic stock when the EU seems unprepared to make similar efforts in the Baltic. Indeed last year Norway explicitly raised this objection to a significant TAC reduction. This situation effectively makes it impossible to adequately protect the stock, and I therefore I believe we must consider more equitable reductions in the two management areas.

Consultation on Fishing Opportunities

I thank the BS RAC for its positive reception of the Communication on fishing opportunities. My services have noted your suggestions for further improvement, and will take them into account when drafting next year's document. I hope by then that one of your concerns, namely the absence of long-term plans for pelagic stocks and for salmon, will be well on the way to being met.

Yours sincerely,


JP Lowri Evans *absent*