

14 July 2017

To: The Fisheries Ministers of the EU Member States

Re: Input to the EU Fisheries Council Meeting, 17 and 18 July 2017

Dear Fisheries Minister,

On behalf of the Fisheries Secretariat (FishSec) and Seas At Risk (SAR), we send you our thoughts regarding the Communication from the Commission concerning a consultation on Fishing Opportunities for 2018 (COM(2017) 368 final). We ask you to consider our views during your discussions at the upcoming Council meeting.

Based on a short analysis of the Communication (Annex 1), we would like you to consider the following points:

- We welcome the commitment of the European Commission to achieve the objectives of the reformed Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), and specifically its objective to restore and maintain fish stock populations above biomass levels capable of producing maximum sustainable yield (BMSY). Given the slow pace towards this objective in the last years and only three more rounds of Council negotiations remaining to agree on TACs for corresponding fishing mortality levels, all decision makers have to **act now** and follow scientific advice.
- Overall, we support the principles set forward in the Communication for fixing fishing opportunities for 2018, including the proposal to apply existing multi annual management plans if they are in line with the MSY objective and therefore result in fishing opportunities below F_{MSY} .
- Regarding TAC adjustments, we do not think that scrapping TACs in order to facilitate the implementation of the Landing Obligation is the way forward.
- All decision makers need to make every effort to facilitate the implementation of the landing obligation through the following sequence of measures, where applicable: starting with swapping quotas between Member States, then between producer organisations; then apply the flexibilities foreseen in the CFP Art 15; then increase both technical and tactical selectivity facilitated through EMFF funding requested by Member States, and finally utilize the exemptions provided.
- Only grant a TAC top-up to those fleet segments that are subject to the landing obligation. Under no circumstances should the granted TAC top-up increase the fishing mortality of that fleet segment, nor should a top-up be assigned when the fishing mortality is above F_{MSY} .

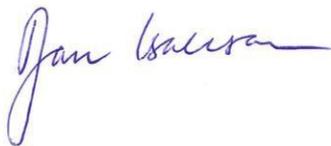
- Data and knowledge on stocks and on the implementation of the landing obligation need to be improved substantially. The success of the CFP implementation cannot be guaranteed if data quality and availability continues to be neglected.
- The contents of the agreed Baltic MAP have raised significant concerns regarding the implementation of the MSY objective. Overfishing, TACs set above F_{MSY} , is permitted if the stock biomass is above $B_{trigger}$ – the biomass level which triggers advice on a reduced fishing mortality relative to F_{MSY} . This and other shortcomings need to be addressed in other MAPs and during the coming revision of the Baltic MAP.
- Member States regional groups should consult Advisory Councils (ACs) earlier during discussions on joint recommendations, both to fulfil the legal requirement under CFP Art. 18.2 and to receive valuable information and advice that can improve the final proposal sent for consideration by the European Commission and subsequent adoption by the co- legislators.

With only two to three years left to achieve some of the key objectives of the CFP, all European decision-makers and stakeholders involved in fisheries management need to step up their efforts. Despite early and repeated warnings from civil society, the measures agreed in the first years after the reform were insufficient. While the benefits of managing EU fish stocks more sustainably are clearly visible as outlined in this communication, a lot remains to be done to achieve full CFP implementation.

Most importantly, according to the basic regulation, the Maximum Sustainable Yield exploitation rate was set to be achieved by 2020 at the latest for all stocks. What we know is that even for stocks where we have scientific advice on TACs in line with MSY, the Council continues to agree on exploitation rates above the target agreed in the CFP for almost half of them. This cannot continue – not only in terms of meeting the objectives of the CFP, but also as it is crucial in order to reach good environmental status under the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive.

In conclusion, we urge the Commission and the EU Member States to stand firm and implement the objectives of the CFP by agreeing sustainable fishing limits for 2018 that will restore and maintain fish populations above biomass levels capable of producing MSY.

Yours sincerely,



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