

## **Comments on the RTC proposal by Seas At Risk, BirdLife International, WWF, EUCC**

### General:

The RTC proposal is presented as an 'alternative' to a permanent closure as is proposed by the Swedish Board of Fisheries. The RTC proposal cannot be considered as an alternative in our view for a number of reasons, as follows:

\*Two different real time closures are suggested. The first aims to protect the cod during spawning (in order to increase recruitment) and the second aims at protection of cod below minimum landing size (in order to reduce discards). However, studies show that cod also concentrate in spawning areas outside the spawning season. The RTC proposal does not reduce **total mortality** of the stock. The main objective of the permanent closure is obviously to decrease fishing mortality on adult cod. Only a larger biomass level provides for better long term recruitment and survival. Without a recovered stock size, economic return will continue to be low. The government proposal does address this, which is both demonstrated and soundly backed up. Equivalent scientific backup of the RTC proposal is lacking. In addition, the government proposal, suggests introducing a system on which all removals are deducted from the TAC – a system known as a bycatch quota. Such a system is advocated where bycatch is a limiting factor on stock recovery, and acts as an incentive for other fisheries to avoid the species through technical or behavioural means.

\*Another major concern is the **Control & Enforcement** – the RTC proposal is not easily enforceable. This relates to the rectangles being too small, the very complicated procedure of actually closing them, and the fact that vessels <15 m do not use VMS - this represents more than half of the fleet.

The status of the Kattegat cod stock is in such a bad shape that a complete closure should be applied, as ICES has advised for a number of years. The closed areas will play a key role in reducing mortality on the stationary Kattegat stock. Any negative socio-economic effects must be seen in the light of the present depleted state, which also has a high socio-economic cost.

The following from the ICES working group supports the urgency of very strict cod protection measures:

- A. SSB declined to the historically lowest level in the end of the 1990s and the available data do not indicate major improvements in the state of the stock since then.
- B. Major decline in fishing mortality in the latest 5 years has likely not taken place despite a sharp reduction of quotas in recent years.
- C. Fishery independent information indicates that removals from the stock are substantially higher than reported landings and that the mismatch between TAC/landings and the total removals has significantly increased in the most recent years.
- D. At present the fishery is very dependent on recruiting year classes. The 2003 year class formed a large part of the fishable stock since 2005. The year class observed as 1 year old in 2007 is indicated to be among the weakest in all survey time series and low recruitment value was observed also in the 1st quarter IBTS survey in 2008.
- E. There is an indication that the proportion of recruits of North Sea origin has increased in recent years, indicating that the decline in recruitment of the Kattegat origin might be even more profound.

Taking into account the major differences between the two proposals, we envisage that a compromise proposal which sufficiently addresses the concerns mentioned above, will be very difficult to achieve, and -in hindsight - beyond the scope of written procedure. We propose therefore that the RTC proposal be submitted with a minority position on behalf of the NGOs.