

Scottish Conservation Credit Scheme (SCCS)

Briefing note by Mike Park

The Scottish Government is making use of the provisions laid down in point 8.5 of Annex IIa to this year's TAC and Quota Regulation in the hope that it will stimulate fishing practices that lead to reduced discards and lower fishing mortality of both juvenile and adult fish.

*Article 8.5, Annex IIa of **COUNCIL REGULATION (EC) No 40/2008 of 16 January 2008***

8.5 - During the 2008 management period a Member State may manage its fishing effort allocations according to a kilowatt days system. By that system it may authorise any vessel concerned for any one of the combination of groupings of fishing gears and special conditions laid down in Table 1 to be present within any one of the geographical areas defined in point 2.1 of this Annex for a maximum number of days which is different from that set out in that Table provided that the overall amounts of kilowatt days corresponding to such a combination is respected.

For a specific combination of geographical areas, groupings of fishing gears and special condition, the overall amounts of kilowatt days shall be the sum of all individual fishing efforts allocated to the vessels flying the flag of the Member State concerned and qualified for that specific combination. Such individual fishing efforts shall be calculated in kilowatt days by multiplying the engine power of each vessel by the number of days at sea it would benefit from, according to Table 1, if the provisions of this point were not applied.

The Scheme, which started on the 1st February, has been developed with advice from a Steering Group (CCSG) whose membership involves a range of representatives from both stakeholders and Government. This short note sets out to explain the basic version of the Scheme.

The steering group hopes to provide an enhanced version of the Scheme in the spring, under which vessels will be able to secure additional days in return for further measures designed to reduce cod mortality and discards.

Basic Scottish Conservation Credits Scheme

The 'scheme', in return for respect of 'special conditions',

- (a) grants a vessel a credit which brings its allocation of days up to its 2007 allocation;
- (b) allows a vessel to be eligible to operate under hours at sea rather than days, based on its allocation of days being multiplied by 24 hours; and,
- (c) allows a vessel to apply for enhanced measures to be developed subsequently by the Steering Group.

The 'special conditions' are as follows:

Real Time Closures (RTCs)

Vessels must respect the following RTC schemes:

- (a) from 1 January to 30 April 2008, vessels must respect the system of RTCs designed to protect spawning cod (*described at the end of this note*).

(b) from 1 May to 31 December 2008, vessels must respect the system of RTCs designed to protect juvenile/undersized cod (the species size, specification and precise geographical area will be agreed at a later date by the CCSG).

(c) Vessels should make all reasonable endeavours to communicate to the Scottish Government Marine Directorate the discovery of aggregations of cod.

Selectivity

A vessel must respect a 'one net rule' so that it carries only one regulated gear mesh size per trip, as defined in Annex IIa. (Derogation from this rule may apply to seine net vessels).

Single and multi rig trawl vessels (*The use of more than 2 nets is currently banned by Scottish vessels*) using 70-99mm demersal gear must from 1 July use 'either' a 110mm SMP inserted at 15-18m from the cod line or one of the SMP options which will be available by then under the enhanced scheme (*Current legislation dictates the use of 90mm SMP in such gears*).

Fleets

A vessel must be part of a fleet which in 2008 conducts:

- two trials of gear designed to improve selectivity;
- supplementary observation programmes, in addition to FRS annual discards survey, as agreed by the CCSG.

Vessels which do not comply with all of the conditions set out above would, initially, return to operating under days at sea rather than hours at sea for the remainder of the year. If, thereafter, a vessel does not comply with any of the conditions for a second time, it has reduced from its total allocation the number of days of the relevant trip - up to a total of the difference between the allocations in Table 1 of Annex IIa in 2008 and 2007 - and will no longer be able to apply to sign up to measures under the enhanced scheme.

The CCSG is currently evaluating the impact of the basic scheme in terms of stock sustainability, economic impact and effort deployed and is ready to adjust the basic scheme as necessary. In particular we are monitoring closely the impact on fishing practices of the hours at sea approach which is designed to allow vessels greater flexibility in their fishing patterns primarily for reasons of safety, fuel usage and cod avoidance. The value of a day at sea has initially been set at 24 hours: on the basis of evidence of the volume and patterns of fishing effort deployed by gear category in the first two months of the scheme, the CCSG will decide whether the value should be reduced to less than 24 hours.

Real Time Closures, Protection of Spawning Cod

The Marine Directorate of the Scottish Government introduced a system of Real Time Closures intended to protect Spawning Cod on the 6th January 2008. For the purposes of this initiative, Spawning Cod is considered to be **any cod** over 50cms in length. The specific features are:

- Ø The threshold number for Spawning Cod is 10 fish per effort hour.
- Ø The number of positive samples required to instigate the introduction of a Closed Area is 1.
- Ø Closed Areas are squares with 7.0 nautical miles sides centred on the agreed position of the sample and aligned North/South/East/West. There are limits on the maximum number of Closed Areas in a given locality (*for socio economic reasons*).
- Ø Closed Areas remain in force for 21 days.
- Ø The RTC applies only to fishing vessels registered in Scotland, vessels from other parts of the UK and elsewhere are encouraged to avoid the Cod Spawning Areas and any Closed Areas.
- Ø The RTC will operate from 6th January to 30th April 2008.
- Ø Sampling will be undertaken by the Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency (SFPA).
- Ø The area of application are ICES Zones IV & VI

Managers, scientists and industry held a meeting of minds in the latter part of 2007 to discuss issues around spawning aggregations and jointly agreed to list several areas, as 'high risk'. These Cod Spawning Areas are purely indicative and advisory in nature, the intention is simply to discourage any fishing effort likely to catch cod within the spawning areas. The view is that, due to the shoaling habits of cod when spawning, avoiding fishing in these areas may significantly reduce mortality amongst cod preparing to spawn as well as allowing them to spawn unhindered.

Vessels electing to fish in one of the Cod Spawning Areas are targeted for repeated inspections while they remain in the area and their catches sampled to identify the number of spawning cod in the catch. Importantly, Spawning Cod sampling is not limited to the Cod Spawning Areas but is undertaken wherever and whenever inspectors consider there to be sufficient quantities of cod in the catch to justify a sample. Similarly, Closed Areas may be introduced whenever a positive sample is found, regardless of the whether the sample position lies within or outwith a Cod Spawning Area.