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DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR FISHERIES AND MARITIME AFFAIRS

Director-General

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Council  
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**Subject: Policy Statement on Fishing Opportunities for 2008**

Dear Mr Andersson,

Thank you for the NSRAC response to the Commission's Policy Statement on Fishing Opportunities for 2008. We welcome the NSRAC's support and comments, although we may have different points of view on some issues.

I will start by what the NSRAC called a generally "pessimistic view of the stocks" in the Policy Statement. The Policy Statement starts with a review of the status of European stocks according to scientific advice and concludes that around four-fifths of stocks remain outside safe biological limits. It is regrettable that most stocks are in a poor state, but it is an indisputable fact.

The Policy Statement is one of the steps taken by the Commission to improve clarity in the TAC and quota setting process. The Commission lays down clear rules whereby, according to scientific advice and input from stakeholders, the level of TAC for the following year is determined. Specifically, the scientific advice provides the basis for an increase or decrease in TAC, but the degree of TAC change is limited to the stability required by the industry. Clarity is one key aspect that all stakeholders have asked for in the TAC process, and in my view the Policy Statement has undoubtedly improved the process. It is unavoidable that with clarity also comes some level of rigidity of the rules for setting TACs, but it is necessary in order to avoid mistrust in the process.

Regarding the stocks where the TACs have not been fully utilised, the Policy Statement determines that if ICES or STECF have not provided scientific advice for a specific stock, then a 15% reduction of the TAC will **only** be applicable if **all** quota-holding MS have failed to reach 85% consumption of their respective quotas. For clarification, the Commission does not assume that a stock is in trouble when it proposes a reduction in TAC due to under-utilisation. The Commission objective is to prevent an expansion of

the fishery in a stock where little is known and thus where an increase in fishing pressure may not be sustainable.

Let me assure you that the Commission always follows the catch forecast provided by ICES, except when the catch forecast is at a level higher than the limits imposed by stakeholders, or when it is the result of negotiations with non-EU countries.

Finally, I welcome the acknowledgement of the NSRAC regarding the deterioration of the quality of scientific advice. The Commission has an important role to play in this as supporters of data collection and, as you mention, commissioners of scientific advice. However, it is crucial that the industry, as the main provider of data, realises the implications of poor fisheries data and its consequences for the scientific advice provided, and takes responsibility for improving it.

I look forward to continuation of dialogue and collaboration with the NSRAC regarding the setting of future fishing opportunities.

Yours sincerely,



Fokion Fotiadis