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NSRAC Demersal Working Group  
Attn: Mr. B. Deas, chairman,

Urk – NL, 15<sup>th</sup> November 2008.

Dear Barrie,

This is the Dutch fisheries sector's reaction to the Draft - North Sea Regional Advisory Council Position Paper: Response to the Commission's proposal for a Council Regulation concerning the conservation of fisheries resources through Technical Measures" (COM(2008)324 final). This draft position paper was handed out during the EXCom meeting held in York on 29/30 October 2008.

We broadly agree with the thrust of the response, with the exception of one issue, which is: Minimum Landing Sizes.

The NSRAC's draft paper states: "We have specific concerns about the removal of the Minimum Landing Sizes of the following species". Six species are then mentioned including plaice.

As you will be aware, the Netherlands is the major player in the North Sea when it comes to plaice fishing, especially if you include the Dutch vessels operating under the flag of other EU member states. You will also know that the North Sea beam trawler fleet has been designated by the European Commission for a pilot on measures to reduce discards. According to this scheme, the Commission formulates only the goals to be achieved (the percentage reduction in discards) and it is up to member states to decide how these goals are achieved. Everyone knows that there is a mismatch between the minimum mesh size for sole fishing (80 mm) and the minimum landing size for plaice.

This is partly why we agree with the Commission's decision to impose a minimum landing size for the sole specie alone in flatfish fishing. We would certainly not support it for plaice.

This flexibility will allow us to meet our obligations in reducing discards. The lack of a minimum size for plaice also enables our fleet to deal practically with that stated in article 10 of Document COM(2008) 324 final: "Real time moving to another area when maximum by-catches are exceeded". We believe that a flexible approach to plaice can make a positive contribution to the management of fish stocks.

It is also worth considering that fishing vessels are regularly subjected to heavy fines when undersized plaice are found during inspections (often hardly 1% of the total plaice catch on board). If no minimum is set for the EU, this problem will also be solved for our fishermen.

It will then be up to the member states or the POs to apply market forces in deciding independently what the minimum plaice landing size should be. We definitely do not support the enforcement of a minimum plaice landing size at European level. We would therefore like to see the NSRAC's draft position paper amended accordingly.

Kind regards,

Dutch Fishing Industry,

Wim de Boer.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.