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Mr. Hugo Andersson
The North Sea Regional Advisory
Council
NSRAC Secretariat
Woodhill House
Westburn Road
Aberdeen AB16 5GB
Scotland
Grande Bretagne

Subject: Fisheries decisions in data-poor situations

Dear Mr Andersson

Thank you for your letter of 18th. June. I welcome the opportunity to explain further and to clarify the Commission's point of view concerning fisheries management decisions in data-poor situations.

I agree with you that it is not appropriate simply to reduce fishing opportunities automatically when biological data are insufficient to calculate a traditional fish stock assessment. However, in order to ensure an appropriate and impartial treatment of fisheries in similar situations, it is helpful to set out clear rules and guidelines.

We have in fact already changed our policy guidelines on this point. A new and more responsive approach has been set out in the Commission Communication "Fishing Opportunities for 2008. Policy Statement from the European Commission" (COM(2007) 295 final). I know the RAC is examining this document, but I would like to draw your attention to section 3.1 where the Commission sets out a more detailed approach to setting TACs in data-poor situations. You will see that we now identify five separate and different cases, with different responses to be made concerning the TAC. One of these is the case you mention, where a non-quantified indication is provided that stocks are increasing and where we consider that a 15% increase in the TAC should apply. I look forward to reading the RAC's detailed reply concerning this "five-case" approach.

I would also suggest that the NSRAC examine an interesting initiative being developed in the Pelagic RAC concerning a harvest rule for horse mackerel whereby the TAC would be adjusted according to the recent historic trend in survey results. Although this has not yet been examined by ICES and STECF, the approach seems very promising and might be applicable to other stocks.

Concerning the provision of advice concerning economic and social factors, I would like to stress that this is one of the Commission's priorities for development in the next few years. I agree that an adequate understanding of economic incentives to ensure that management measures can be effective in achieving the desired goals.

We have made a significant start in this process and we shall continue developing our capacity especially in areas where we still have problems such as e.g. data handling and analysis, and the development of new methodologies in the advisory process. Also, we still have in several cases problems with the quality and quantity of available data, which does not allow a proper analysis of economic and social implications. These are all areas where the support from the RACs would be extremely valuable, and I suggest we continue discussing to see where synergies can be developed.

Yours sincerely,



Fokion Fotiadis