

The North Sea Regional Advisory Council

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NSRAC

Issued: Tuesday, October 23, 2007

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Advisory Committee urges Commission to re-think flatfish advice

The North Sea Regional Advisory Council (NSRAC) is writing to the European Commission urging it to make sure scientists are adopting the right approach in providing advice on flatfish fisheries for next year.

It wants the Commission to make the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) change its current position and use the Flatfish Long Term Management Plan as a basis for scientific advice on stocks in the North Sea.

It emerged at the NSRAC's Executive Committee meeting in Aalborg, Denmark this week that ICES had not used the Management Plan to develop its latest advice to the Commission.

The Long Term Management Plan was agreed by the Fisheries Council earlier this year, and includes input from the NSRAC and from Norway.

The NSRAC is the formal channel for stakeholders to provide suggestions and advice to the EC and the Council of Ministers on fishing in the North Sea.

The Regional Advisory Councils, of which six are operational, are a key element of the 2002 reform of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP).

They aim for better engagement of the people the policy affects and for more regionally-focused fisheries management.

The Long Term Management Plan for North Sea Plaice and Sole is to be implemented on January 1, 2008.

The NSRAC played an important role in the development of this important and far-reaching plan.

The NSRAC is concerned that if ICES is giving its advice in a format that does not fit with the agreed Long Term Management Plan then fishermen may think there was little point working closely with the Commission in the preparation of the plan.

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The NSRAC believes it is important for fishermen and scientists to work in the same direction to achieve common goals.

This year, ICES has continued to give its advice based on the precautionary approach, where, if stocks are below a certain target level, the advice is that stocks should be brought back to a precautionary level within one year. The Long Term Management Plan adopts a more flexible approach.

If ICES used the agreed Flatfish Long Term Management Plan for 2008, the limit on Plaice would be 49,000 tonnes, rather than the ICES figure of 35,000 tonnes, for example.

The NSRAC is writing to the EC following its meeting in Denmark, which was attended by representatives of the European fishing industry and environmental Non Governmental Organisations.

It will advise the commission that advice on stocks should be based on the Long Term Management Plan, and will press it to urge ICES to reassess its advice for 2008.

“We need to express dissatisfaction with the approach that’s been taken,” said Barry Deas, chairman of the NSRAC’s Demersal Working Group and chief executive of the National Federation of Fishermen’s Organisations (NFFO).

“The management plan that was implemented by the Fisheries Council to a large extent reflected the advice of the NSRAC, and we were content with that. With the new plan being implemented in January, we believe that ICES should be presenting its advice in the right format.”

-Ends-

Notes to editors:

Countries involved in the NSRAC are: Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden and the UK.

These stakeholder-led forums give fishermen and other interested parties, including environmental organisations and consumer groups, a say in the way the CFP operates. They are the formal channel through which stakeholders can give suggestions and advice to the European Commission and the Council of Ministers.