



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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Dear Presidents,

The Commission would like to thank the Houses of the Oireachtas for its Opinion concerning the proposal for a Council Regulation fixing for 2015 the fishing opportunities for certain fish stocks and groups of fish stocks, applicable in Union waters and, for Union vessels, in certain non-Union waters and repealing Council Regulation (EU) No 779/2014 {COM (2014) 670 final}.

The Commission takes note with great interest of the positions expressed in the Opinion and would like to respond to some of the points raised by the Houses of the Oireachtas.

As the Houses of the Oireachtas note, the proposal contained some significant total allowable catches (TAC) cuts, also on stocks of importance to Ireland. The Commission, as in previous years, based its proposal on the best available science, and aims at the long term sustainability of the fisheries concerned. For many important commercial stocks, the scientific advice allows, and the Commission proposed, TACs in line with the objective of the new Common Fisheries Policies (CFP) to manage stocks at the level which ensures the maximum sustainable yield (MSY). For so-called data limited stocks, the quality of the advice is also improving. For MSY stocks, the Commission proposal aimed to achieve Fishing mortality providing Maximum Sustainable Yield (FMSY) in 2015. For data limited stocks, the Commission applied the advice on a case by case basis – moving in the direction of the scientific advice, but limiting the actual cuts required to get to the actual figure advised (for example, if the 2014 TAC is 1000t and the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea recommend a TAC for 2015 of 600t, the Commission's proposal would limit the cut to a maximum of -20%).

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The Commission welcomes the efforts by the Irish authorities in the field of data collection and scientific advice.

In making its proposal, the Commission takes into account the adverse socio-economic impact of significant TAC cuts. At the same time, a long term perspective and the health of the stock are important considerations as well. Socio-economic impacts are also at the heart of the discussions about key stocks during the Agriculture and Fisheries Council on 15 and 16 December 2014. The Commission has also stated that it expects the Member States concerned to provide concrete proof of adverse socio-economic impacts. Indeed, the Basic Regulation¹ in its recital 7 states that achieving MSY exploitation levels after 2015 "should be allowed only if achieving them by 2015 would seriously jeopardise the social and economic sustainability of the fishing fleets involved." For several of the stocks mentioned in the Opinion, the cut agreed by the Council was considerably reduced. On the TACs agreed with third countries such as Norway, a good outcome was achieved during the Council meeting in December 2014 for some stocks, whereas other negotiations are continuing into 2015. As in the past, the Commission aims to achieve an outcome that is positive for our fishermen.

On the suggested ringfencing of specific herring quotas for small businesses, the Commission recalls that national quota management is a competence of the Member State concerned.

The Commission believes that the final outcome of the Council negotiations on the Commission's proposal for Fishing Opportunities for the Atlantic for 2015 reflects a responsible decision by Council that takes into account the science behind the Commission proposal and is in line with the reformed CFP.

On discards, the Houses of the Oireachtas will have been informed that discard plans for pelagic fisheries have entered into force on 1 January 2015. Work has started within the different regional groupings of Member States to develop joint recommendations for discard plans for demersal fisheries.

The Commission notes that the Houses of the Oireachtas would like to see the Commission working with the industry to achieve sustainable fishing models. The Commission will continue to work with the industry, notably through the Advisory Councils.

Finally, the Commission welcomes Ireland's commitment to the reformed CFP. It also notes the Houses of the Oireachtas' suggestion that a gradual approach should be taken. The Commission will continue to support the Member States' work to implement the CFP, for example through the Member States' development of joint recommendations for discard plans.

¹ Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 on the Common Fisheries Policy, amending Council Regulations (EC) No 1954/2003 and (EC) No 1224/2009 and repealing Council Regulations (EC) No 2371/2002 and (EC) No 639/2004 and Council Decision 2004/585/EC.

The Commission hopes that these elements clarify and address the issues raised by the Oireachtas and looks forward to continuing this political dialogue in the future.

Yours faithfully,



*Frans Timmermans
First Vice-President*



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Member of the Commission*