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### **Mixed bag for EU fishing opportunities 2016**

In the early hours, the Fisheries Council reached a long-awaited agreement over the fishing opportunities for 2016; just weeks before the latest and toughest phase of the discard ban comes into effect.

It has been generally positive for many whitefish boats and the increases in quota on many stocks reflect a huge improvement in management measures and highlight the enormous sacrifices made by the sector.

The North Sea sees increases in haddock by 19% and cod by 15%. The increase in the North Sea sole stock is finally now reflected in the quota. After years of cuts, there has been a slight increase, fully in line with MSY, whilst easing the socio-economic hardship of recent years. The positive development with plaice in the Eastern English Channel is down to sound and effective management measures implemented by the fleet.

In the Kattegat, there are significant increases in TACs for sole and cod by a whopping 85% and 270% respectively, which is a clear turning point for all parties, following the huge effort from fishermen and scientist working in cooperation.

We welcome the fact that the advice from the North Western Waters Advisory Council on Eastern Channel Sole was listened to and resulted in a very balanced approach which should see this stock reach MSY in the near future.

However, the sector sees hefty cuts for Celtic Sea cod and haddock. This comes as a blow given that scientific advice recognises that the cod stock is expected to increase by 2017. Selectivity measures have been in place for haddock since 2014 and will be extended following the upcoming discard ban. This reduction in discards should therefore be reflected in a TAC increase and this will come as a surprise to many fishermen.

The Gran Sol fishery sees a significant increase of hake by 19%, 5% megrim and a roll-over of monkfish. Fishermen in the Gulf of Cadiz, in general, also welcome increases of 26% Norway lobster, 15.3% mackerel and 10% anchovies. However, the cut of 14% of monkfish will hit this fleet particularly hard.

Regarding the Northern Cantabrian fleet, although the final result was not as harsh as the proposal from the Commission, there has been a reduction of 21.5% of the southern hake stock and a 14% cut in monkfish. The 20% increase in opportunities for bluefin tuna once again shows that the stock recovery carried out in recent years, with huge sacrifices made by the fishermen, has finally paid off and produced great results; all the more important given the accusations that this stock has been close to extinction.

Most decisions on pelagic stocks had already been taken over the last few weeks during negotiations with Norway and the other coastal states. However, a decision on the management and quota setting for blue whiting and Atlanto herring was still pending. At the last moment during this December Council, the European Commission confronted the Member States with a signed agreement between the Commission and Norway for both stocks that does not make sense because it is very unbalanced and overly favours Norway. It was therefore not supported by the Member States a few days earlier. Confronted with this take-it or leave-it tactic at the last moment by the Commission, the Member States regrettably approved the blue whiting agreement. Europêche deplores and rejects this blue whiting agreement and the way the Commission has dealt with it.

President of Europêche, Javier Garat said: *"The result achieved this morning is the best that could have been obtained for many stocks. All our fishermen want to meet the objectives of the CFP and ensure the sustainability of fisheries but we must have the flexibility to meet those targets. We are hugely disappointed with the Commission's behaviour regarding blue whiting which favours Norway and goes against the interests of the European fleets."*

**END**

**Europêche** represents the fisheries sector in Europe. Currently, the Association comprises 13 national organisations of fishing enterprises from the following 9 EU Member States: DE, DK, ES, FR, IT, MT, NL, PL, UK.

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