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Fisheries Council set catch limits in the Atlantic and North Sea for 2017

In the early hours, after two-day intensive negotiations, the Fisheries Council has reached an agreement over the fishing opportunities for 2017 based on the objective of achieving maximum sustainable yields (MSYs) by 2017 where possible, and by 2020 at the latest, while taking into consideration duly justified socio-economic factors.

For this purpose, the fishing industry, represented by Europêche and EAPO, sent a joint position paper with relevant recommendations for about 25 stocks calling on the Council of Fisheries Ministers not to take the time table towards Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) as a dogma, but to apply a pragmatic and common sense approach to reaching the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) objectives.

Following a first analysis of the Council's agreement, the fishing industry could verify that the decision widely follows the Commission proposal which is based on the scientific advice provided in June 2016 by the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES).

This decision has been generally positive for many whitefish and pelagic boats and the upward trend in many stocks reflects a huge improvement in management measures and shows the enormous sacrifices made by the sector. In fact, for next year, the number of fish stocks at MSY levels in the North-East Atlantic will reach the unprecedented number of 44 stocks. In addition to this positive news, there will be an increase in the number of stocks within safe biological limits.

A number of stocks were subjected to top-ups. For instance, The North Sea sees increases in **cod** by 17% and **whiting** by 17%, in order to compensate for former discards and help fishermen to adapt to the landings obligation. However, the fishing bodies argue that these flexibilities are far from solving the problem of choke species in mixed fisheries and fishermen from all over Europe are distressed and faced with a high level of uncertainty in the future as a result of the discard ban.

The EU fishing sector welcomes the increases in the North Sea **saithe** by 53%, **monkfish** by 20%, **Northern hake** by 10% and **prawns** by 46%. In addition, the 15% **sole** increase in the North Sea is immensely positive; this TAC has increased by 25% in only two years as a result of its good shape. However, the industry believes that there was still room for improvement in the TAC of major species such as the Northern hake whose biomass is at historical levels and is now under the landing obligation.

In contrast to the above, the sector sees hefty cuts for North Sea and West Scotland **haddock** which are down by -46% and -47% respectively. Same goes for **cod** in North and South-Western Atlantic waters, which although the final result was not as harsh as the proposal from the Commission (-68%), there has been a reduction of -38%. This decision will hit the fleets targeting these species particularly hard.

Europêche and EAPO welcome the roll-over decision taken over the TAC of the **anglerfish** in Areas VII and VIII and Pollack in area VIII, underpinned by the positive trends in both stock size and landings. However, the sharp TAC cuts in areas VII (-25%) and VIII (-25%) for **megrim** will provoke significant socio-economic losses for the fleets targeting this species.

In the **Kattegat**, there are significant increases in TACs for sole and cod by a whopping 41% and 42% respectively, which is a clear turning point for all parties, following the huge effort from fishermen and scientists working in cooperation.

Concerning the **Southern hake**, we welcome the fact that the final result was not as harsh as the proposal from the Commission (-31%), keeping the TAC almost at the same level as in 2016, accompanied by a strong 54% increase in **Southern monkfish**. It is also important to highlight the elimination of restrictions for the **sea bass** as proposed by the European Commission.

It is quite remarkable the huge increase in Northern **herring** by 104%, contrasting with a poorer performance of the same species in other EU areas. The **horse mackerel** appears to be in a similar situation, since for most areas the Council decided to drop the TAC by -23% while increasing in the North Sea (+26%) and Iberian waters (+7%). **Mackerel** proves to be in good shape with generalised TAC raises.

President of Europêche, Javier Garat said: *"The result achieved this morning reflects the positive trends for many fish stocks thanks to the many efforts made by our fishermen during the last decade. They deserve the full support from the EU institutions and must be awarded with positive quotas. We are committed to meet the objectives of the CFP, but within a workable and generally accepted time-frame"*.

President of EAPO, Pim Visser declared: *"Many stocks have recovered and have delivered stable and sustainable catches, this proves that long-term management plans and consequent management over the years have been successful. The fishing sector looks forward to continuing working with scientists, particularly on increased knowledge on data deficient stocks which will be taken up in 2017."*

ENDs

Europêche represents the fisheries sector in Europe. Currently, the Association comprises 15 national organisations of fishing enterprises from the following 10 EU Member States: DE, DK, ES, FR, IT, MT, NL, LV, PL, UK.

EAPO represents 40 Producers Organisations from 10 EU Member States, with approximately 10,000 vessels, 3.5 million tonnes of landings and a first sale value of € 3 billion.

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