



## Response from the NSRAC to the Communication from the Commission on Fishing Opportunities for 2010

1. The NSRAC welcomes the European Commission's Communication on fishing opportunities for 2010, which provides greater transparency for the setting of TACs.
2. In the initial section of the Communication, setting out general principles, the Commission has missed an opportunity to refer to the integration of current Community directives and regulations, including the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive and the EU's Sustainable Development Strategy. Fisheries in Europe are currently managed in isolation, regardless of the good intentions of the Maritime Policy. The setting of TACs and quotas should take into account the requirements stipulated under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, which aim to achieve and maintain good environmental status by the year 2020 at the latest.
3. The NSRAC has previously questioned the strong dependence of the Commission's current management regime on a single species approach, which is inappropriate for the mixed fisheries of the North Sea. The Commission must devote much more attention to the management of North Sea fisheries through the drawing up of long term management plans aimed at achieving greater stability and a more sustainable approach. The current approach is too short-term and should not rely on *ad hoc* formulae, revised from year to year.
4. The fisheries sector is concerned that the section of the Communication referring to the state of the resources abuses statistics and paints too bleak a picture of the state of fish stocks – especially in relation to conditions in the North Sea. Stocks of haddock, plaice, saithe and *Nephrops* are in good condition and are being exploited within safe biological limits. In addition, the North Sea cod stock is recovering and its management plan is consistent with the precautionary approach.
5. On Category 6-9 stocks, where analytical assessments are lacking or where information on the state of the stocks is not available, the NSRAC recognises that a request for advice has now been submitted by the Commission to ICES and STECF. The NSRAC has commented earlier, welcoming the Commission's initiative on this issue, which is a very important one, affecting many different fishing fleets. The Commission's approach is a useful starting point for discussion on how to deal with stocks where there is substantial uncertainty in the

assessments. However, the NSRAC has a number of concerns over the broad nature of the proposed approach:

- a. There is a need for a more differentiated approach. The stocks included in category 6-9 vary greatly in their state; it cannot be assumed that they are all under threat. We have previously drawn attention to complexities over the assessment of *Nephrops* that make the preparation of quantitative catch tables difficult. However, no one would suggest that this is either a stock that is in jeopardy or one for which information is severely limited or compromised. Yet *Nephrops* may be treated in the same way as stocks for which there may be real fears and which we know very little. Again, we emphasise the need to develop long term management plans for the *Nephrops* and other fisheries to avoid the imposition of annual *ad hoc* measures.
  - b. There is also an issue over what is being done to meet the Commission's obligations to comply with its obligations from Johannesburg. The WSSD implementation plan is an important objective which cannot be met through the current *ad hoc* approach for category 6-9 stocks. Definition of more stable targets for all stocks is an important component of the fisheries management plans that the NSRAC wishes to see put in place for all the North Sea fisheries. In this connection the NSRAC notes that the 15% constraints being proposed are symmetrical, with the same magnitude of reduction and increase. In some instances there may be a case for asymmetrical constraints in favour of being more precautionary when a stock is not being fished sustainably. Again, the Commission's approach is rather arbitrary, doctrinaire and insufficiently adaptive. There is a need to differentiate between stocks according to their status and how far they deviate from MSY.
  - c. Lack of reliable data on catches and discards is still creating uncertainties for some fisheries. The NSRAC has previously made the general point that it is most important to increase the level of scientific information which is available for stocks falling within category 6-9. The NSRAC is especially concerned that information available to fishers themselves is not always fully used in assessments. The NSRAC would like to discuss with the Commission the implementation of a more cooperative approach to collecting information on fish stocks, and has already been discussing these issues with scientists through participation in the recent ICES Benchmarking Workshops. The NSRAC has noted that in some cases scientists have not been performing stock assessments because they lack sufficient staff & resources to do so. In those instances where data are lacking, incentives should be provided to those operators who do provide accurate data on catches and discards.
5. In preparing its Communication on fishing opportunities the Commission has tried to cover the whole of the CFP area. Many of the generalisations it makes do not apply in the North Sea. These problems underline the need for a regional seas approach within the CFP and the NSRAC hopes that full consideration will be given to the adoption of this approach in the proposed reforms to the CFP.

- 8.8 There is explicit criticism in the Communication of the Council setting levels of TACs and effort that are higher than those which are in accord with the advice from scientific agencies. However, it does fall to the Council to take account of economic and social factors. There must be some flexibility. Multi-species factors must also be taken into account. Again, the NSRAC position is that many of these problems would be resolved if more of the North Sea fisheries were subject to long term management plans, agreed with stakeholders.