

The North Sea Regional Advisory Council

NSRAC Secretariat
Woodhill House
Westburn Road
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Scotland



NSRAC

Mr Fokion Fotiadis
European Commission
Director General - DG Mare
B-1049 BRUSSELS
Belgium

15 December 2009

Dear Mr Fotiadis

You will be aware of the concerns already expressed within the North Sea Regional Advisory Council over the introduction of the new Omega 3 net gauge. At the last meeting of the Demersal Working Group in Haarlem we were informed that netting which had proved satisfactory when measured with a wedge gauge was now consistently failing measurements made with the Omega meter. Netting manufacturers and fishers had been working to a standard which has now changed significantly with the introduction of the new meter. It was known before the new meter was introduced that it was capable of producing discrepancies and yet the Commission and the Control Agency failed to resolve this problem or to communicate properly with the national inspectorates or the fishing industry.

As a consequence, fishing nets which were providing satisfactory measurements with the original wedge gauge are now failing when measured with the new Omega gauge. Inspectors are being inflexible in their interpretation of the measurements and fishers are faced with the prospect of having to invest substantial sums in acquiring new nets, or the payment of large fines, at a time when they can ill afford to do so.

Investigations by the industry with an independent scientific agency have confirmed that the new meters can yield flawed measurements, including systematic errors, depending on the way they are handled.

It had been agreed by the NSRAC that a small industry group from the RAC would seek a meeting with the Commission and the CFCA to discuss the protocols being applied, and this group would subsequently report back to the NSRAC.

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In the event, Commission officials have refused to engage with the NSRAC group on this important issue.

The RACs were set up to enable dialogue to take place between stakeholders and the Commission over matters of importance. The Commission cannot absolve itself from responsibility over the unsatisfactory state of affairs with respect to the introduction of Omega meter, or place responsibility entirely in the hands of the CFCA. Indeed the refusal to meet with the NSRAC is symptomatic of a deeper problem. In an effective management system legislators and managers would maintain an interest in the *implementation* of measures and adapt them if necessary. In this case, having taken the decision to use the Omega meter the Commission has now washed its hands of the matter. It has shown no concern over the impact. There is unwillingness on the part of the Commission to engage fully with the RACs or to discuss this and other matters of critical importance.

The NSRAC would like to resolve the problems being caused by the introduction of the new Omega gauge; and to do so quickly before fishers are penalised unnecessarily. It is seeking an immediate meeting with the Commission.

Because of the importance of this matter we are copying this letter to the chair of the Fisheries Committee of the European Parliament, as well as to the head of the CFCA.

Yours sincerely



Hugo Andersson
Chair, NSRAC

cc Harm Koster, CFCA
Carmen Fraga Esteves, European Parliament Fisheries Committee

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