



EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

The Director-General

Brussels,  
MARE D3/ (2017)

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Chairman  
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**Subject: Sea bass Management in the North Sea**

*Your ref: 03-1617*

Dear Mr. Wichmann,

Thank you for your letter dated 8 December 2016, in which you provide comprehensive and timely advice on the management of sea bass. I would like to thank the North Sea Advisory Council for their on-going commitment to developing effective management strategies for sea bass.

You will be aware that the Commission's proposal has been examined by the Council of Ministers on 12 and 13 December 2016. The Council of Ministers have agreed on a package of measures for managing sea bass in 2017. These measures build on the actions of previous years, namely maintaining the closure in waters adjacent to Ireland, setting a by catch limit for demersal trawls, an annual allocation for hook and line fishermen and a by catch provision for fixed gill netters. For recreational fishermen the existing closure for the first six months of the year is maintained and a single fish bag limit is set for the remainder of the year. For full details please consult the Regulation which we expect to be published in the Official Journal around 27<sup>th</sup> January 2017.

We estimate that actions in 2016 have resulted in a decrease in landings compared to 2015. The actions agreed for 2017 will continue to reduce landings. We do however support the case you present for a longer term solution that is more reflective of the mortality and variety of fisheries in which sea bass is caught. In addition to a long-term management strategy, you advocate for evaluation of the current measures, improving the data collection, a more cohesive approach to scientific research and examination of alternative options.

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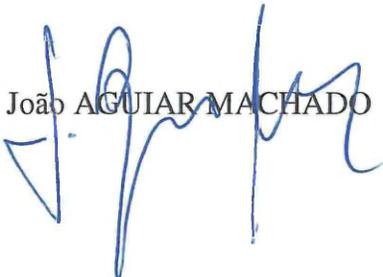
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We fully recognise the limitations of the current approach, as annual measures are difficult to assess. It is difficult to separate the effect of 2016 measures from the expected development of the stock. The research commissioned by the Netherlands on the 2015-2016 measures demonstrates a further issue: management measures effective for one fleet may have little or unintended impacts on other fleets. Scientific information continues to improve and we will examine carefully the result of the upcoming ICES benchmark, but it is clear that better co-ordination of all aspects of sea bass management is necessary. We still consider that a multi-annual plan is the correct vehicle to support the needed improvement in co-ordination and management measures.

You seek a consideration of a single species versus a multi-species management plan. Multi-annual plans, as prescribed by the CFP require the Commission to make a proposal on the scope of the plan, objectives, quantifiable targets, timeframes and safeguards for remedial action. These specific requirements remain the same in a single species or mixed fishery plan, the framework is essentially the same. A single species plan would still have to address the mixed fishery issues for sea bass and be applicable to all fisheries where sea bass is caught. We therefore consider the inclusion into a mixed fishery plan warranted. Once a proposal is made the same process is applicable; joint recommendations on how to achieve the objectives of the plan have to be developed, examined and implemented. We consider that the mixed fisheries approach, which is already under way for the North Sea and the North West Waters, offers a timely mechanism to effect better management, including prompting the better evaluation of alternative strategies, such as real time closures and avoidance strategies.

Thank you again for your detailed advice on this very important subject. If you have any questions on this reply, you may contact Ms Evangelia Georgitsi, coordinator of the Advisory Councils ([evangelia.georgitsi@ec.europa.eu](mailto:evangelia.georgitsi@ec.europa.eu); +32.2.295.04.43).

Yours sincerely,

  
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