

Scheveningen Group of regional North Sea Member States
Dutch Presidency - Att. Ms. Roos Strating
Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food quality
Postbus 20401
2500 EK Den Haag
The Netherlands

NSAC Transparency Register ID: 91682404018-74

NSAC Advice Ref. 13-2021

NSAC Advice to the Scheveningen Group on the Discard Plan

This advice paper was approved with consensus by the NSAC Executive Committee via fast-track written procedure on 28 April 2021.

1. Background

In April 2021, the NSAC Landing Obligation Focus Group met to discuss the 2022 Discard Plan, to identify possible choke risks and applicable mitigation measures in the North Sea demersal fisheries, and to tackle the issues pertaining to exemptions applied in directed fisheries. In so doing, the focus group considered the latest information provided by the Scheveningen Group of North Sea Member States, STECF, as well as the relevant information and data from our members.

In this paper we will provide you with the most recent information on the North Sea demersal fisheries, recommendations on exemptions, and attempt to comment on the issues related to derogations in directed fisheries. We will do this bearing in mind the difficulties imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic in collection and provision of scientific data.

2. Advice

It is to NSAC's understanding that the 2022 Discard Plan is to remain roughly within the framework of 2021 Discard Plan with possible additional underpinning as requested by the STECF in its 2020 Plenary Report¹. We note and support that the existing exemptions are upheld on the basis of sufficient data. Nevertheless, we would like to draw attention to and acknowledge the difficulties in obtaining additional data requested by the STECF due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemics. In the NSAC, we are concerned about the uncertainty that STECF is causing by not giving advice but merely setting question marks even when the

¹ JRC122989; PLEN 20-03 (pub: 2020.11): <https://bit.ly/3sZiHW0>



NSAC is supported by The European Commission

matters in question have been observed/noted before. We find it important that a pragmatic approach will be taken in those cases where additional scientific underpinning of exemptions cannot be (entirely) provided due to the sanitary crisis, and that all existing exemptions remain in place until this problem is resolved.

Plaice is exempted from the landing obligation in many fisheries under the assumption of high survival. However, the NSAC is aware that the level of *Nephrops* caught in a mixed fishery in trawls has an influence on the survival of plaice, where higher proportions of *Nephrops* lead to lower survival of plaice. Consequently, there is a need for defining conditions under which the derogation does not apply. In order to ensure a high survival of plaice in mixed fisheries, the NSAC therefore suggest to implement a rule stipulating that when there is more than 50% (in weight) of *Nephrops* in the catch, the high survival derogation for plaice does not apply and all plaice has to be landed. This shall hold for gear type Otter Bottom Trawl (OTB) TR 1 and 2 and shall be applied based on the estimation of the catch on a haul-by-haul basis as soon as it comes on board.

Finally, and with regard to the ongoing EU-UK negotiations and parallel legislation drafting on both sides, we would like to raise awareness on the need for conformity of regulations for EU and UK waters. Considering the many shared stocks in the North Sea we find it important that any regulations proposed are mutually aligned, so as to uphold the highest ecological and socio-economic sustainability standards in exploitation of marine resources and to ensure level playing field for all North Sea users. With the bilateral negotiations still not concluded, and thus no fixed procedures for swapping in place, we are also deeply concerned that serious choke problems will develop. We will try to address these in our potential subsequent advice.



NSAC is supported by The European Commission