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NSAC Advice Ref. 01-2223 **NSAC Advice on Anglerfish**

This paper was approved by the NSAC Executive Committee on 1 December 2022 via written procedure.

It follows from the ICES advice for Anglerfish, published 28 October 2022, provided collectively for the entire area from the west of Scotland over the North Sea to the Skagerrak and Kattegat, that when the MSY approach is applied there should be a reduction of 30% in the TAC for 2023 compared with the TAC for this year. This is a significant reduction.

The NSAC would like to express its views with regards to the scientific information underpinning the advice, for your consideration.

Many fishers are concerned about the advice. The advice from ICES strikes the NSAC industry members as out of touch with what is observed at sea by the fishers. The stock development index that the scientists utilize to calculate stock assessments, which eventually translates to ICES advice, shows a steady increase in numbers from 2021 to 2022. When this is held against the numbers of the previous years, however, it is a reduction, which is why ICES advise a reduction in the TAC for precautionary reasons.

The industry members of the NSAC have previously drawn attention to the inappropriateness of reductions in quota of a growing stock, particularly when fishers must at the same time comply with the landing obligation.

In the view of the fishing industry members, for anglerfish, the missing information from 2020 prevents a better assessment of the stock status, since the last two years have only been compared with the previous two, whereby the decline, on paper, has become greater than it has been in reality. This is particularly worrisome since the stock in 2022 is larger than it has been in most years during the period for which the data is available.

Finally, it should be mentioned that the quota for anglerfish in the North Sea has been reduced according to the scientific advice every single year since 2019, when it was 20,237 tonnes. In 2022, it is 9,014 tonnes.

Fishers from the Shetland Islands and Scotland in the West, to Swedish and Danish fishers in the East, including in the Skagerrak, report increasing catches. This is in accordance with the

scientists' description of the population status. The French fishers targeting saithe in 4a see an increase in catches of anglers as well. Furthermore, fishers from Netherlands and Belgium targeting flatfish in the Mid-eastern North Sea experience increased catches of anglers and strive to avoid the species becoming a choke species. To avoid this situation, the fishers try to keep away from areas where anglerfish is abundant. At least one Danish vessel has switched trawls to reduce their catch of anglerfish.

The NSAC would like to further recall that there is a common interest in the EU, Norway and the UK to set up a joint management strategy for the anglerfish. Against this backdrop, it would be reasonable not to make hasty quota decisions only on the basis of the advice the ICES has provided for anglerfish for 2023.

We remain at your disposal for further discussions on the matter.