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Cc: DG MARE

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NSAC Advice Ref. 18-2223
NSAC Advice on technical measures in directed fishery for squid

This paper was approved by the NSAC Executive Committee on 23 October 2023 via written procedure.

1 Background

On 22 September 2023, the NSAC received a request for advice from the Danish Presidency of the Scheveningen Group concerning technical measures for the conservation of fishery resources of the North Sea, concretely on technical measures for directed fishery for squid.

Regulation (EU) 2019/1241 establishes a framework for technical measures for the conservation of fisheries resources and the protection of marine ecosystems. Article 15 with its annexes establishes technical measures at regional level and empowers the Commission to adopt delegated acts in order to amend, supplement, repeal or derogate from those technical measures. The delegated acts are adopted on the basis of joint recommendations (JR) submitted by Member States concerned, in accordance with Article 18 of Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013.

The regional Annex V for the North Sea area, part B provides for baseline mesh sizes for towed gear (point B 1.) and point 1.1. lays down the basic mesh sizes. Point 1.2. stipulates that for certain directed fisheries listed in the tables in part B smaller mesh sizes may be used provided that by-catches of cod, haddock, and saithe, do not exceed 20 % of the total catch in live weight of all marine biological resources landed after each fishing trip.

The draft joint recommendation for which NSAC advice has been sought requests an amendment to the option granted in Annex V for the directed fishing for squid. Increasing the minimum mesh size for this fishery aims at improving fishing practices in the North Sea, in line with the objectives and targets set out in the Regulation, under Article 3(2)(a) on the optimisation of exploitation patterns to provide protection for juveniles and spawning aggregations of marine biological resources, and Article 4(1)(a) on the reduction of catches of marine species below the minimum conservation reference size.

Under the current definition in Annex V, part B, it is legal for a fishing vessel to fish for squid with mesh sizes of 40mm and up in the whole North Sea. This potentially facilitates abuse of the derogation from the baseline mesh size and is contrary to the objectives outlined in Article 3(2)(a) and 4(1)(a) of Regulation (EU) 2019/1241. To amend this deviation from the baseline mesh size, the Scheveningen Group proposes to increase the minimum mesh size of this directed fishery to 80mm.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide our view on the proposed Joint Recommendation for technical measures concerning directed fishery for squid in the North Sea. We invite you to consider our advice below.

2 NSAC Advice

The NSAC members are generally positive about the proposal to increase the minimum mesh size in the directed fishery for squid to 80mm. This increase in mesh size has in fact been one of the key elements of a joint voluntary proposal (Gentlemen's agreement) between the French, Dutch, and Belgian flyshoot vessels in the Southern North Sea and Channel (specific ICES area 7d). A change in mesh size for any directed fishery on squid could be adjusted in the existing category in Annex V. In this way, the Scheveningen group is retaining the level playing field between EU and UK waters for fishers.

In addition, we strongly advise the Member States to keep the specific gear category for the directed squid fishery to maintain a clear distinction between different types of fisheries. Moreover, it is imperative that a level playing field is sought with other sea basins (i.e. the North Western Waters).

3 Conclusion

In conclusion, the NSAC believes that an increase in minimum mesh size in the squid fishery is viable and beneficial. In addition, the Member States might want to consider maintaining the gear type specifications to the directed fishery for squid and seek a level-playing field with other geographical areas where targeted squid fisheries are present.