

Sea Bass : UK Request for measures under Article 12 of the CFP Regulation

At this week's meeting of the Council we were not able to agree measures to protect the seriously threatened stock of sea bass. However, there was included in the final compromise an important statement which underlined the commitment of the Commission and the Member States involved in this fishery to do the utmost possible, as of the start of the fishing season in January 2015, to reduce fishing pressure, protect spawning aggregations and so prevent a collapse.

The Commission has noted there is a particular imperative to protect spawning aggregations, which occur during the January to April season, with especially strong concentrations in the Western Channel (area VIIe). Consistent with the statement included in the final compromise, this requires urgent action to address the threat to these fishery spawning aggregations posed by pelagic trawling for bass from the start of January. According to the ICES advice, in 2013 this fishery accounted for 37% of all commercial catches.

In line with the commitment made at Council, the UK stands ready to work with the Commission and the other Member States involved in this fishery to take measures to protect this stock from the start of January 2015. Given the urgency of the situation, we are hereby making a reasoned request, under the terms of Article 12 of the CFP Regulation (1380/2013), for the Commission to adopt emergency measures to alleviate the serious threat to the sea bass stock. To reduce fishing pressure by protecting the spawning aggregations the UK proposes the adoption of measures to close area VIIe to pelagic trawlers targeting bass during January to April 2015. This is consistent with the focus of the Commission's original proposal in the TACs and Quotas regulation.

Should it be possible to identify an alternative and equally viable approach to protect the spawning aggregations from the start of the fishing season in January 2015, the UK would be willing to assist in developing such an alternative and, on implementation, withdraw this request.

Further action will be required to address additional sources of mortality on the sea bass stock from other commercial fisheries and the recreational sector ahead of those fisheries taking place later in the year. We are already looking at ways to reduce the pressure exercised by these sectors on bass stocks in domestic waters, as part of our approach to promoting a more sustainable fishery. However, the need to take urgent action from January 2015 to protect the spawning aggregations justifies the use of emergency measures under Article 12.

In support of our request we would refer the Commission to the ICES advice on European sea bass and the 46th Plenary Meeting Report of the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (Plen-14-02) from July 2014 (and the

accompanying technical paper below). For ease of reference, the main ICES and STECF reports can be found on the following links:

<http://www.ices.dk/sites/pub/Publication%20Reports/Advice/2014/2014/bss-47.pdf>

http://stecf.jrc.ec.europa.eu/documents/43805/812327/2014-07_STECF+PLEN+14-02_Final+Report_JRC91540.pdf

I am copying this request to other Member States with a fishing interest in VIIe (France, Netherlands, Belgium and Ireland). I am also copying this to the Chair of the North West Waters Advisory Council. In line with the procedure outlined in Article 12 of 1380/2013, they have seven working days to submit any written comments on this proposal, that is by 2 January 2015. A Commission decision on whether to adopt these measures with immediate effect is then expected by 14 January 2015.

Should the Commission or other Member States wish to discuss this further, please contact Roy Smith (roy.smith@defra.gsi.gov.uk, +44 207 238 1245) or Andrew Randall (andrew.randall@defra.gsi.gov.uk, +44 7715 989411) in the first instance.

John Robbs

UK Fisheries and Marine Director

London

19 December 2014