

9.2.3.4 EU request for ICES to evaluate the management strategy for boarfish (*Capros aper*) in Subareas VI–VIII (Celtic Seas and the English Channel, Bay of Biscay)

Advice summary

ICES notes that the management strategy follows the rationale for TAC setting procedures used in the ICES advice, but with some additional caution. ICES therefore considers that the management strategy is precautionary.

Request

The EU has requested ICES to evaluate the following management strategy:

This management strategy aims to achieve sustainable exploitation of boarfish in line with the precautionary approach to fisheries management, FAO guidelines for new and developing fisheries, and the ICES form of advice.

- 1) *The TAC shall be set in accordance with the following procedure, depending on the ICES advice*
 - a) *If category 1 advice (stocks with quantitative assessments) is given based on a benchmarked assessment, the TAC shall be set following that advice.*
 - b) *If category 1 or 2 (qualitative assessments and forecasts) advice is given based on a non-benchmarked assessment the TAC shall be set following this advice.*
 - c) *Categories 3-6 are described below as follows :*
 - i) *Category 3: stocks for which survey-based assessments indicate trends. This category includes stocks with quantitative assessments and forecasts which for a variety of reasons are considered indicative of trends in fishing mortality, recruitment, and biomass.*
 - ii) *Category 4: stocks for which only reliable catch data are available. This category includes stocks for which a time series of catch can be used to approximate MSY.*
 - iii) *Category 5: landings only stocks. This category includes stocks for which only landings data are available.*
 - iv) *Category 6: Category 6 – negligible landings stocks and stocks caught in minor amounts as bycatch*
- 2) *Notwithstanding paragraph 1, if, in the opinion of ICES, the stock is at risk of recruitment impairment, a TAC may be set at a lower level.*
- 3) *If the stock, estimated in the either of the 2 years before the TAC is to be set, is at or below Blim or any suitable proxy thereof, the TAC shall be set at 0 t.*
- 4) *The TAC shall not exceed 75 000 t in any year.*
- 5) *The TAC shall not be allowed to increase by more than 25% per year. However there shall be no limit on the decrease in TAC.*
- 6) *Closed seasons, closed areas, and moving on procedures shall apply to all directed boarfish fisheries as follows:*
 - a) *A closed season shall operate from 31 March to 31 August. This is because it is known that herring and mackerel are present in these areas and may be caught with boarfish.*
 - b) *A closed area shall be implemented inside the Irish 12-mile limit south of 52°30' from 12 February to 31 October, in order to prevent catches of Celtic Sea herring, known to form aggregations at these times.*
 - c) *If catches of other species covered by a TAC amount to more than 5% of the total catch by day by ICES statistical rectangle, then all fishing must cease in that rectangle for 5 consecutive days.*

Elaboration on ICES advice

Sections 1.a and 1.b of the proposed plan conform to the ICES category 1 assessment/forecast procedure. As such these sections are in conformity with the maximum sustainable yield (MSY) and the precautionary approach (PA) (ICES, 2015).

ICES notes an apparent misprint in Section 1.c, and assumes that the purpose of this section is to follow the ICES precautionary approach for TAC setting. The EC has confirmed that ICES interpretation is correct. ICES has not evaluated the

TAC decision rules in Section 1.3. However, if they are followed, they would result in management in accordance with the ICES precautionary approach.

The plan is more cautious than the precautionary approach, by virtue of Sections 2 and 3, which provide an additional clause whereby the TAC can be set lower than implied by the precautionary approach if considered relevant (Section 2) or at zero if there is evidence that biomass is below B_{lim} (Section 3). The provision of Section 3 removes ambiguity that may exist in TAC decision making in the event of biomass (or SSB) $< B_{lim}$. ICES notes that this is more precautionary than the current ICES framework for advice.

Sections 4 and 5 provide TAC stability mechanisms, Section 4 placing an upper ceiling on possible TACs in any year, and Section 5 allowing limited increase but unlimited decrease in TAC. In a new, developing fishery, such as this one, management should be as reactive as possible to information from changing stock perceptions, especially negative perceptions. Therefore, ICES welcomes that there is no constraint on TAC decrease. Though ICES has not evaluated the effect of the 25% TAC increase constraint, or the 75 000 tonnes TAC ceiling, both are generally considered favourable as they limit large increases in catch.

Section 6 presents seasonal and area closures, partly to avoid bycatch of herring and mackerel. Such closures are a welcome addition to the plan. ICES identifies that the start date for the seasonal closure is 15 days later than in the previous long-term plan agreed by the Pelagic AC in 2013. ICES recommends that any such change be supported by scientific evidence that there is low risk of bycatch of herring and mackerel. This should include the results of on-board observers.

ICES notes that if the TAC was reduced to zero a 25% limit to the increase in TAC would not reopen the fishery. The simplest solution may be to suspend the 25% limit when reopening the fishery and follow ICES advice.

Sources and references

ICES. 2015. Advice basis. *In* Report of the ICES Advisory Committee, 2015. ICES Advice 2015, Book 1, Section 1.2.