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European Commission proposes long-term recovery plan for cod

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Report Highlights:

On May 6, the European Commission proposed the introduction of a long-term recovery plan for a number of cod stocks threatened with depletion. If adopted, the proposed plans would replace the current interim recovery measures put in place by the December 2002 Fisheries Council.

Includes PSD Changes: No
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Commission proposes long-term recovery plan for cod

Introduction

On May 6, 2003, the European Commission proposed the introduction of a long-term recovery plan for a number of cod stocks threatened with depletion. Earlier measures had proved inadequate to protect such stocks. In March, the Commission organized a two-day workshop to discuss long-term recovery measures for cod and hake with EU fisheries stakeholders. If adopted, the proposed plans would replace the current interim recovery measures put in place by the December 2002 Fisheries Council and which involve low fishing opportunities and restrictions on fishing effort. The aim of the proposal is to rebuild the cod stocks to sustainable levels over a period of five to ten years by means of a tripartite approach: reducing total allowable catches (TACs), limiting fishing effort and specific control and monitoring rules to enforce effective implementation. This multi-annual plan is the first in a series. A similar recovery plan for hake will be presented shortly and plans for sole, haddock and lobster will also be submitted this year.

The proposal can be downloaded from the Internet at http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/en/com/pdf/2003/com2003_0237en01.pdf.

Stocks covered

The stocks covered by the recovery plan are cod in the Kattegat, the North Sea including the Skagerrak and the Eastern Channel, to the west of Scotland and in the Irish Sea. The proposed plan identifies minimum stock sizes below which stocks are considered at high risk of collapse. When target recovery levels (150,000 MT) have been reached for two consecutive years, the Commission will propose to remove the cod stock concerned from the recovery plan and to include it in a multi-annual management plan.

The recovery plan does not include the Baltic Sea as fisheries in the Baltic are managed within the framework of the International Baltic Sea Fisheries Commission. A long-term management plan for Baltic cod was established in 1999 and a recovery plan in 2001. On April 14, 2003, the Commission adopted emergency measures establishing a temporary ban on some cod fisheries to protect spawning cod (Commission Regulation 677/2003).

Total Allowable Catches (TACs)

Control of fishing effort is the focus of the recovery plan. The Commission proposes a long-term rule governing the setting of TACs and the corresponding fishing effort needed to catch the available quotas. The aim of this rule is to increase the quantities of adult fish by 30 percent a year. TACs for other species that are caught together with cod will also be affected by the cod recovery plan.

Limiting fishing effort

Cod fishing effort under the current temporary rules is being controlled by a limited number of days that fishermen can spend at sea. Under the long-term recovery plan, this system would be replaced by the allocation of "kilowatt-days" (the engine power of a vessel multiplied by the days spent fishing) to member states which will distribute them among their vessels. The fishing effort of all the vessels catching cod will be calculated and the adjustment in fishing effort will be determined. The allocation of kilowatt-days will be proportional to the impact that a member state's fleet has on the cod stocks concerned. Kilowatt-days can be redistributed to vessels within but not across the geographical areas.

Control and Monitoring Rules

The cod recovery plan also provides rules to strengthen fisheries monitoring and control, including special reporting requirements, an obligation to land catches above a certain quantity in designated ports and conditions for the weighing and transport of landed cod. The Commission will submit a separate proposal on the use of the satellite Vessel Monitoring System.

EU Financial Aid

As the long-term recovery plans will have a severe impact on fishermen's income, the European Commission has established a EUR 32 million "scrapping" fund to help those member states affected by the plans. This adds to the funds already available for decommissioning vessels under the Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance (FIFG) for the 2000-2006 period. The new aid would go to vessels whose fishing effort has to be reduced by 25 percent and more and would pay 20 percent higher premiums than already available under the FIFG for the permanent removal of these vessels.

EU financial aid was also available to vessel owners and crews whose activities had to be temporarily ceased. In cases where the temporary stoppages result from the implementation of a recovery or a multi-annual management plan, financial aid can be extended from the present one year to two years.

The European Commission is also encouraging member states to make more use of the funds available under FIFG for socio-economic measures such as the retraining of fishermen and to support diversification of activities allowing fishermen to continue fishing on a part-time basis. So far, member states only claimed 3 percent of the EUR 3.7 billion available for this purpose.

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