



*European Economic and Social Committee*

**NAT/740**

**Multiannual plan for fish stocks in the Western Waters**

## **OPINION**

European Economic and Social Committee

**Proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a multiannual plan for fish stocks in the Western Waters and adjacent waters, and for fisheries exploiting those stocks, amending Regulation (EU) 2016/1139 establishing a multiannual plan for the Baltic Sea, and repealing Regulations (EC) No 811/2004, (EC) No 2166/2005, (EC) No 388/2006, (EC) 509/2007 and (EC) 1300/2008  
[COM(2018) 149 final – 2018/0074 (COD)]**

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| Council referral                             | 12/04/2018  |
| European Parliament referral                 | 16/04/2018  |
| Legal basis                                  | Articles 43(2) and 304 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union |
| Committee Bureau decision                    | 17/04/2018  |
| Section responsible                          | Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment                            |
| Adopted in section                           | 05/09/2018  |
| Adopted at plenary                           | 19/09/2018  |
| Plenary session No                           | 537   |
| Outcome of vote<br>(for/against/abstentions) | 182/1/2   |

## **1. Conclusions and recommendations**

- 1.1 The EESC considers the establishment of a multi-annual plan to be an appropriate measure for managing the Western Waters, although the specificities of fisheries in the North Western and South Western Waters should also be taken into account.
- 1.2 The EESC believes that this regulation should be aligned with the objectives of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) and the importance of the socio-economic component should therefore be mentioned when allocating fishing opportunities.
- 1.3 The EESC calls for the lists of species affected by this regulation to be updated, through regionalisation, as some of these species hamper the management of mixed fisheries because of their low catch rates, because they are considered to be by-catches or because of the lack of quotas in some Member States. This is particularly important given the imminent entry into force of the landing obligation and the emergence of "choke species", which could in some cases block fishing activities.
- 1.4 The EESC stresses the need to increase scientific research efforts through the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF), with a view to gaining more knowledge about the real status of fish stocks and thus avoiding, as far as possible, applying the precautionary approach, while also ensuring the sustainable use of these resources over time.

## **2. Summary of the Commission proposal**

- 2.1 The objective of the Proposal for a Regulation under consideration is to establish a single management plan for demersal stocks, including deep-sea stocks, and their fisheries in the Western Waters.
- 2.2 The plan will ensure that these stocks are exploited according to the principles of maximum sustainable yield (MSY), using the ecosystem approach, in accordance with the precautionary approach. This is intended to provide stable fishing opportunities based on the most recent scientific information and to facilitate the introduction of the landing obligation.
- 2.3 Stocks should be managed in accordance with the FMSY ranges (where F stands for fishing mortality) recommended by the International Council on the Exploration of the Sea (ICES), ensuring that fishing opportunities for a given species are set within the lowest FMSY range available. However, fishing opportunities may also be established at lower levels than these ranges or, under certain conditions and provided that the stock in question is above the MSY Btrigger (the spawning stock biomass), in line with the highest available FMSY available at that time.
- 2.4 Fishing opportunities will be fixed in any case so as to ensure that the probability of the spawning stock biomass falling below the biomass limit (Blim) reference point is no more than 5%.

- 2.5 When allocating fishing opportunities, Member States shall take account of the likely catch composition of vessels participating in fisheries.
- 2.6 The Commission has been granted the power to adopt technical measures relating to the characteristics or limitations of fishing gear by means of delegated act, with the aim of improving selectivity, reducing unwanted catches and their impact on the eco-system, as well as fixing minimum sizes for conservation and provisions for the landing obligation.

### 3. **General comments**

- 3.1 The EESC considers the establishment of a multi-annual plan to be an appropriate measure to guarantee the exploitation of fishing resources in the medium and long term in Western Waters.
- 3.2 However, the Committee believes that when drawing up the plan consideration should be given to the specific features and differences between fisheries areas in North Western and South Western Waters, depending on the different characteristics of their fleets, fishing activities (types) and the duration of fishing trips.
- 3.3 The EESC insists that the plan should contribute to achieving all of the CFP's objectives and therefore socio-economic impact studies and the economic viability thresholds for each of the arrangements subject to regulation must also be considered when fixing fishing opportunities. However, this component is missing from the content of the Proposal for a Regulation.
- 3.4 The Committee is concerned about the consequences of applying the precautionary approach in cases where there is a lack of scientific data on fisheries and the repercussions of this in terms of a direct reduction in fishing opportunities. The EESC therefore calls on the Member States and the Commission to boost their efforts in research, in order to increase knowledge of these stocks. Moreover, the Committee believes that if scientific assessments of fish stocks are not analytical, the total allowable catches (TACs) should not be reduced significantly until evaluations have improved.
- 3.5 In the case of mixed fisheries, where problems have been identified involving choke species included in the plan that may block fishing activities relating to the main target species, the EESC believes that the possibility of excluding such species from the TAC system should be considered and alternative management measures should be proposed, through regionalisation, to ensure the good state of stocks.
- 3.6 The specific features of certain species and zones require a form of fisheries management which, in order to be effective, should facilitate the establishment of management sub-zones within the same ICES division. The Committee calls on the Commission to include this possibility in the regulation.

### 4. **Specific comments**

- 4.1 Article 1 sets out a list of species that make it difficult to manage mixed fisheries, including deep-water species which have their own distinct TAC and quota system. Moreover, this system

is biannual and in the Committee's opinion their inclusion therefore creates confusion. In some Member States, these species are rarely caught or not at all, and are regarded as by-catches, as is the case for Alfonsinos (*Beryx spp*). The red seabream (*Pagellus bogaraveo*) in subarea IXa also has a number of specific features relating to the fishing zones (the Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts where there is no TAC and quotas) and to participation in fishing fleets from third countries. The EESC is therefore of the view that it does not make sense to include it in the list when the extent to which these countries are ready to align their management with EU principles and interests is unknown.

- 4.2 There are also species such as sea bass (*Dicentrarchus labrax*) and whiting (*Merlangus merlangus*) in area IXa, which are not subject to a system of TACs and quotas, thus the Committee considers that reference to them should be deleted. For other species such as cod (*Gadus morhua*), whiting (*Merlangus merlangus*) in area VII or haddock (*Melanogrammus aeglefinus*) some Member States have very little quota, and so these species can clearly be limiting for certain fleets. They are therefore considered to be choking species. The Committee also considers it necessary for them to be removed from the list.
- 4.3 A number of errors have been identified in the definition and scope of the functional units relating to the Norway lobster (*Nephrops norvegicus*) and the EESC therefore believes they should be revised.
- 4.4 In the Committee's view, the estimate of fishing opportunities based on the MSY, as provided for in Articles 3, 4 and 5, means that only variables associated with the conservation of fish stocks are taken into account. The plan should contribute to meeting all of the CFP's objectives, in accordance with Article 2 of Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013 and should not focus solely on environmental variables, but consider social and economic ones as well, thus avoiding abrupt changes in fishing opportunities between consecutive years.
- 4.5 In order to prevent the annual management of fishing opportunities from impeding multi-annual management and to encourage the involvement of stakeholders in decision-making, the co-legislators should amend Article 4 of the proposal for a management plan by including a legal basis for the approval of operating rules in line with the CFP principles, through regionalisation.
- 4.6 Article 5(2) establishes that the precautionary approach shall be applied to fisheries management in cases where not enough scientific information is available. The EESC suggests laying down effective mechanisms under the plan, via the EMFF, which are able to increase the collection of scientific information within the time-scale and with the frequency required to avoid the closure of fisheries.
- 4.7 Article 9 establishes that when allocating fishing opportunities available to them, Member States shall take account of the likely catch composition of vessels participating in mixed fisheries. The Committee believes that this principle goes well beyond what is laid down in Article 17 of Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013 on the criteria for the allocation of fishing opportunities to the Member States.

Brussels, 19 September 2018

Luca JAHIER  
President of the European Economic and Social Committee

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