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COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Accompanying the document

Proposal for

**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**

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Executive Summary Sheet

Impact assessment on a proposal for a Regulation of the EP and the Council establishing a multiannual plan for demersal stocks and their fisheries in western EU waters

A. Need for action

Why? What is the problem being addressed?

In the EU's Western waters most demersal fisheries catch several species together in one fishing operation. The problem is that the current rules foresee fishing opportunities as if the fish were caught separately. In reality however, several species are caught together and the biological state of fish stocks with lower quotas depends on other, higher quota stocks, caught in the same mixed fisheries. This leads to a situation where once the lower quotas are exhausted, fishermen continue targeting other fish with higher quotas. They will however continue to have fish in their nets, where the quotas are already exhausted and will discard them until 2019 when the obligation to land all catches will come fully into force. This leads to overfishing of those fish stocks with lower quotas and it means we cannot increase the number of sustainably fished stocks. As of 2019 such a governance framework of having quotas, which are not in sync with each other will lead to early closures of fisheries where quotas are still available. Such a situation could also cause a lack of industry buy-in into the management of these fisheries.

What is this initiative expected to achieve?

The initiative is expected to achieve a management framework that can ensure that fish stocks in western waters are environmentally sustainable in the long-term and are managed in a way that is consistent with the objectives of achieving economic, social and employment benefits, and of contributing to the availability of food supplies. The initiative would allow the mixed character of these fisheries in Western waters to be taken into account when setting future fishing opportunities and quotas, instead of the current, single species, quota system.

What is the value added of action at the EU level?

Fish stocks and fishing vessels move freely across national waters and international boundaries. Action at individual Member State level alone is therefore unlikely to be effective in managing fisheries. The added value of action at EU level is hence that we can ensure to have effective management measures taken, which would be binding for all Member States and all vessels fishing on demersal fish in western waters. This would ensure achieving the objectives of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) of a sustainable management of fish stocks and achieving economic, social and employment benefits.

B. Solutions

What legislative and non-legislative policy options have been considered? Is there a preferred choice or not? Why?

Three options have been considered:

Option 1 (Baseline scenario) using the existing tools of the CFP such as quota setting and regulating technical measures (the rules on how and where to fish) and existing single-species management plans.

Option 2: Replace the existing plans with one mixed fisheries multiannual plan (MAP) for Western Waters

Option 3: Replace the existing plans with two mixed fisheries multiannual plans covering the North-Western and South-Western waters

Both for the mandatory and the optional elements of MAPs, policy choices need to be made. For example; on the use of F_{MSY} ranges, which can have positive or negative effects, depending upon their use. For the analysis, options 2 and 3 were compared to the baseline, option 1. Environmental, socio-economic and administrative impacts and their effectiveness, efficiency, coherence and acceptability were all considered in the analysis. The preferred option is to have one multiannual plan covering all Western waters (option 2) as this option has performed best to deliver a consistent management framework for mixed fisheries. This option also allows simplification and transparency as stakeholders would have one management plan only to apply and they can agree measures in regionalisation.

Who supports which option?

Only two Member States addressed this in the targeted consultation, and both agreed that Multi-annual plans such as Options 2 and 3 are preferable to Option 1, which they viewed as ineffective or to be used as a last resort only.

C. Impacts of the preferred option

What are the benefits of the preferred option (if any, otherwise main ones)?

It is not possible to quantify the direct economic or social benefits from sustainable fisheries, but it is certain that healthy stocks provide the best long term security in terms of income and employment from fisheries. The qualitative analysis demonstrates that the option of creating one mixed fisheries multiannual plan for all western waters, scores best on the following criteria:

- Effectiveness and Efficiency
- Reducing administrative burden
- Achieving the overall main objectives of the CFP
- Provides a management framework facilitating stability and predictability for the fishing industry

The preferred option is the best way forward to ensure effective and sustainable management of mixed fisheries in Western waters. This will eventually benefit fishermen, downstream industry (processing, retail) and ultimately consumers.

What are the costs of the preferred option (if any, otherwise main ones)?

In terms of environmental impacts, the outcome could only be positive compared to the status quo. It is not possible to quantify the direct economic or social short term negative impacts that would result from either one or two MAPs, but negative impacts are expected to be minor in the short term, and would be outweighed by positive impacts in the long term. The administrative costs are considered less with the preferred option of one MAP for the Western Waters. The MAP would establish the necessary framework for sustainable management in line with the objective of the policy. Management of fisheries is already taking place, and the initiative would merely improve the framework.

How will businesses, SMEs and micro-enterprises be affected?

In the status quo, the fishing fleets directly bear the increased fishing costs, and at the same time suffer the immediate consequences of low fishing yields, and quota cuts led by the need to rebuild stocks. Poor yields and poor economic performance would affect also all the downstream related industries. The large majority of fishing businesses in the catch sector are small or medium-sized enterprises (SME) or even micro-enterprises. About 99.5% of the firms own 5 vessels or less and employ around 10 crew members or less and around 92% of the fleets own just one vessel and employ around two crew members (micro-enterprises). In general the environmental, social and economic impacts of the initiative will be positive in the medium and long term as stocks are expected to be more robust and would increase over time. Increased stocks will allow an increase in fish quotas for the industry and this in turn will improve and stabilise their income.

Will there be significant impacts on national budgets and administrations?

No, the initiative would make the existing management framework more effective, without significant impacts on national budgets and administrations.

Will there be other significant impacts?

The initiative will simplify fisheries management in Western waters by combining many species and fisheries into one plan. It will also deliver on regionalisation, a major pillar of the Common Fisheries Policy which aims to focus at EU level on general targets and objectives, while leaving concrete implementation to be developed by regional groups of Member States, to allow for regional specificities to be taken into account.

D. Follow up

When will the policy be reviewed?

Under the assumption that the MAP for demersal fisheries in western EU waters are adopted by the end of 2018, a first evaluation could take place by the end of 2023.