



OBSERVATIONS ON THE COMMUNICATION BY THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND COUNCIL ON FISHING OPPORTUNITIES FOR 2016 (COM(2015)239 final)

1. INTRODUCTION

In its COM (2015) 239 final communication, the Commission opens up a public consultation on the fishing opportunities for 2016 within the framework of the new CFP.

For yet another year, in our opinion, the Communication should coincide with the new requirements of the CFP in terms of clear, simple information aimed at all the parties involved, giving particular emphasis to the end consumer of wild fish who should be informed as to if the fish consumed has been caught on a sustainable basis.

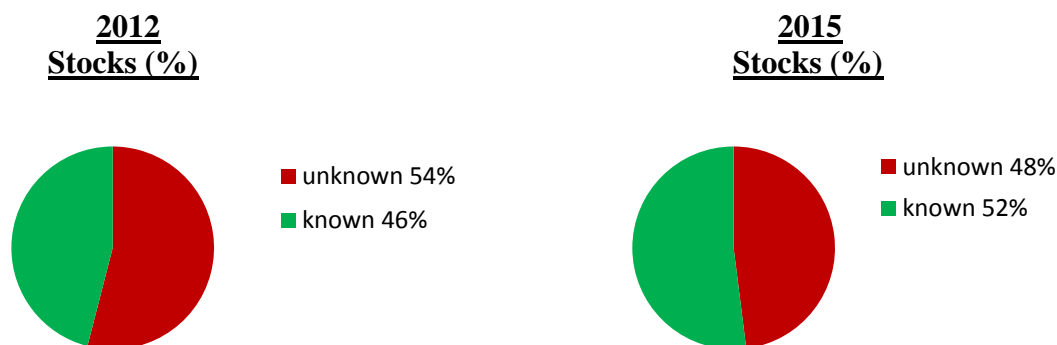
The Commission should inform on the reductions in capacity and fishing effort that the fleet has had to implement in order to reach the MSY. At the same time, the Commission should explain if the fishing opportunities (TACs) recommended by the scientists have been optimized.

2. THE CONSUMER WANTS TO KNOW:

2.1. KNOWLEDGE

ARE FISHING OPPORTUNITIES BASED ON SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE?

Unfortunately, progress is very slow on this point. In global terms, while in 2012, out of every 100 fish stocks¹ only 46 stocks were known about scientifically (biomass, mortality, MSY, etc.). in 2015 only 52 stocks are known². In other words, in 2012 the degree of scientific knowledge was 54% and in 2015 it equals to 48%, still very high.



¹ Fish stock should be understood as the fish of a given species in a given area (stock-area).

² See web : http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/cfp/fishing_rules/tacs/index_es.htm (TAC y cuotas 2012 y 2015)

The sector calls for increasing efforts in compiling scientific data on the fish stocks that are still unknown and that this compiling is speeded up as much as possible.

WHAT DOES THIS LACK OF SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE IMPLY?

This lack of scientific knowledge of fish stocks may imply that fish supply to the European consumer has to come from third countries, many of which do not practice sustainable fishing since reaching the Maximum Sustainable Yield in the fish stocks does not rank among their objectives.

This is the case because the fish stocks with incomplete data or with no scientific data are assigned small fishing opportunities by applying the **precautionary approach** to them, i.e., the most pessimistic projection is applied out of all the existing ones. For this reason, the EU companies that traditionally caught these species will have fewer quotas to catch them and, to supply them to the market, which will have to turn to third countries which, in many cases, lack the same sustainability criterion as the EU (especially the Asian countries). Consequently, it could be said that the EU fleet is not competing in equally conditions as these of fleets.

DOES THE PRECAUTIONARY APPROACH APPLIED IN THESE CASES TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE LOSS OF EMPLOYMENT THAT IT MAY CAUSE COMPANIES?

According to the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fishing, the loss of employment certainly should be taken into account when applying the **Precautionary Approach**³. But however, the Commission does not take it into account so that the reductions proposed for fish stocks with a lack of scientific knowledge, where the precautionary approach is applied, are always made without studies analysing the consequences that they may cause in the loss of employment and in the economies of the companies affected. Nor are there studies analysing the effects caused by quota reductions in the regions highly dependent on fishing.

For these reasons, as a sector, we insist on all the means being made available to improve scientific knowledge and the social and economic consequences involved in the lack of scientific knowledge being taken into account.

2.2. MANAGEMENT OF FISHING OPPORTUNITIES. CAN THE FISHERMAN USE 100% OF HIS QUOTAS?

Unfortunately, the areas that are highly dependent on fishing, as is the case of Galicia, with a 22% unemployment rate, continue to suffer from a poor management of surplus quotas, surpluses that occur each year and are not used by any of the Member States, while their use could save employment in some community fleets.

³ See article 7.5 of the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fishing.

In order to understand this situation, the case of available monkfish in Galicia is paradigmatic. The Galician fleet operating in Grand Sole⁴ needs more monkfish quota each year because, historically, it was assigned a very small quota in comparison with the quotas for other species caught together (megrim and hake, among others). Nevertheless, after the quota exchanges between Spain and other Member States, the final quota assigned to the Galician fleet continues to fall short and no more can be acquired, despite the fact that **about 14,000 tonnes of monkfish per annum are not used, this meaning 30% on average of the annual monkfish TAC for Grand Sole.**

In fact, the Galician fleet cannot **annually lease monkfish quotas** in exchange for financing projects (with private financing) in European States and regions where the 14,000 tonnes of monkfish are not used. And it is unable to finance those projects in exchange of quota due to the fact that the EU regulations do not require that the 100% of the available quota is used or transferred otherwise, to other Member States fleets.

The Commission should be aware that what the UNO requires from third countries is not applied internally: the share out of surplus to other countries through fishing agreements. At community level, this principle is not taken into account, which means that, in the case of Galicia, between 2008 and 2013, **30 vessels have been scrapped, almost 30 million euros have been spent with public funds to aid scrapping and almost 2000 jobs have been lost⁵.**

Therefore, the Commission should establish a system to make optimization and use of fishing opportunities held by Member States possible.

2.3. WHAT IS THE STATUS OF THE FISH STOCKS FOR WHICH SCIENTIFIC DATA ARE AVAILABLE?

The consumer should know that:

- A. Starting from the statistical base itself⁶, 40% of the known stocks (35 out of 86 with scientific reports) were exploited up to the Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY)⁷ in 2012, whereas in 2015, this figure rose to 42.6% for the known stocks (43 out of 101 with scientific reports).**
- B. Practically all the stocks, in 2015, that have reached the MSY, have been caught by trawling nets.** If we are referring to deep-sea stocks with scientific data available, it can be stated that they have reached the MSY and that they have been caught with **bottom trawls⁸.**

⁴ ICES Zones VI and VII.

⁵ See the document on website: "www.arvi.org": The waste caused by relative stability: the case of monkfish" in 2015

⁶ See website: http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/cfp/fishing_rules/tacs/index_es.htm (TAC and quotas 2012 and 2015)

⁷ The MSY is the optimum level advised at the Johannesburg Summit that should be reached when possible.

⁸ For instance, grenadier in Zones Vb, VI and VII.

- C. The Commission does not publish the efforts and sacrifices that the sector has been forced to make (losses of employment, reduction in sales, etc.) to contribute to achieving the MSY in 43 stocks in 2015.**

It is the opinion of the sector that the Commission's Communication on fishing opportunities for 2016 should give some examples of the reduction of capacity and of fishing effort that the community fleet has had to make in order to bring itself in line with the plans that have led to the MSY. We believe that the consumer should be aware of what the fishing companies are doing to achieve the MSY.

- D. The stocks that still have not reached the MSY but that lie within the biological safety limits or are subject to a long-term plan approved by scientific reports continue to be practically stable.** In 2012, they accounted for 33.7% of the known stocks (29 out of 86), practically the same as in 2015 (34 out of 101). These stocks are the object of overfishing because they have still not reached the MSY, but this does not mean that they are not being monitored since they are subject to a long-term plan to enable them to reach the MSY⁹.

Furthermore, if we look back 10 years before, overfishing, understood in the terms of the Commission was identified in 94% of the stocks in 2005, whereas in 2015 it stands at 33.66%.

- E. The stocks that are beyond the biological safety limits and are not being managed by a long-term plan or for which the scientific reports indicate that they should not be exploited, in 2012 accounted for 25.6% of the known stocks (22 out of 86), whereas in 2015, this percentage has fallen to 23.7% (24 out of 101), breaking the upward trend observed in 2014.**

The sector is willing to continue collaborating with the scientists so that these stocks are managed by long-term plans in order to reach the MSY as soon as possible.

3. DISCARD BAN

The Commission's Communication refers to this situation and to the timing scheduled for the obligation of landing the catches of certain species in 2016. The consumer should be aware of the enormous difficulties that the community fleets are going to have to deal with, some more than others, due to the share-out of quotas or non-used surpluses and the volume of discards. For this reason, **the consumer needs to be transparently informed of the sacrifices and adaptations that the fleets are going to have to undergo, both on board and on the market, in order to be able to eliminate discards (losses of employment, reduction in sales, etc.).**

Furthermore, the quotas, that should now be calculated on catches and not on landings, should compensate for the sacrifices that the fleets will have to make and be able to minimize, as much

⁹ See how the Commission defines "overfishing" in http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/documentation/publications/poster_tac2015_es.pdf

as possible, the impact that such a ban is going to involve for the fleets and for the EU market where the consumer purchases.

Although discard ban is accepted both the fishing sector and scientists are concerned about the repercussion on the fisheries target stocks resulting from the phasing-out elimination of discards.

Nevertheless, the ICES, in its report dated the 31st March 2015, notes that in the majority of stocks landings are still used as a basis for calculating the TACs.

4. CONCLUSIONS

In our opinion, the Commission's Communications on fishing possibilities for each year should be aimed at giving clear, simple and balanced information for the end consumer.

The consumer must, in the first place, know the real status of the scientific knowledge on the resources. It must know what is being done to increase this knowledge and must know what the sacrifices and efforts made by the primary supplier of fish are, i.e., the catching sector, in order to reach the MSY, to comply with multiannual plans or with the ban on discards.

The consumer must know that there are fleets in the EU that have to continue reducing, not because the resources are in a poor state, but because the surplus that other fleets have and that do not use them cannot be used, without allowing those who need them to use them either.

We understand that both the positive and the negative sides of fisheries should be made known, in a clear, balanced manner, so that there is no misinterpretation (intentional or otherwise) regarding the reality of the environmental, social and economic sustainability of the fisheries, to avoid such a misinterpretation being taken advantage of by radical organizations to discredit the fisherman. To illustrate this, the Commission should state loud and clear that practically all the stocks that have reached the MSY in 2015 have been caught by trawling methods, i.e., that trawling is being used because it makes it possible to reach the objective of sustainability. The same can be said about the reductions in fleet capacity, about the technical measures, about monitoring, etc. All this information should reach the end consumer in a clear and transparent manner.

June, 2015