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COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

Accompanying document to the
Proposal for a
COUNCIL REGULATION
establishing a long-term plan for the Western stock of Atlantic horse mackerel

SUMMARY OF THE IMPACT ASSESSMENT

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SUMMARY OF THE IMPACT ASSESSMENT
on the proposal establishing a multi-annual plan for the western stock of Atlantic horse mackerel and the fisheries exploiting that stock

The Impact Assessment concerns a draft proposal that would set long-term management objectives and implementing methods concerning the fisheries for the Western stock of the Atlantic horse mackerel. The scope of the proposal is of medium importance, covering about 60 million EUR per year in terms of catch value. Approximately 600 vessels, 6000 at-sea jobs and some 140,000 tonnes of fish catch for human consumption would be affected by the proposal, which is intended to deliver stability and sustainability. The fleet segments involved in this fishery are dominated by medium to large pelagic trawlers. The Impact Assessment focuses on those fleet segments which have horse mackerel among their five most important species. These segments cover about 83% of the overall catch. The value of the horse mackerel catches comprises only a small to medium important part of similar catching opportunities available to the same fishing fleets (between 1 and 20% according to the fleet concerned).

The objective of the proposal is to:

- contribute to implementing the Common Fisheries Policy's overall objective (ensuring the sustainable exploitation of marine living resources in ecological, economic and social terms) for one concrete stock. This will be achieved by ensuring that the annual decision-making on fishing possibilities corresponds to biological indicators on the development of the stock which the most renowned scientific bodies have confirmed as being meaningful.
- As an ancillary objective, the proposal aims to establish, for the sector concerned, predictability for the annual legislative decisions on total allowable catch for the stock, and to provide stability to such decision-making.
- As another ancillary objective, the proposal aims at attracting scientific analysis to the stock and increase over time the database and stock assessment quality.

Scientific and Stakeholder Committees have been consulted. In fact, the proposal mirrors an initiative taken by the stakeholders organised in the Pelagic Species Regional Advisory Council (PelRAC).

The proposal is supported by DG MARE as an additional element in steering decision-making under the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) towards a long-term framework that is compatible with international obligations and with the CFP objectives themselves. Indeed, this text represents the second case where a long-term management approach is proposed for stocks that are not outside safe biological limits, following the management plan for herring in the west of Scotland[1]. Furthermore, it stands out by applying a biological indicator other than stock biomass and fishing mortality, and relies on precedent work and an initiative undertaken within the sector.

The operational elements and options are:

- **Option 1**: no policy change; continue fixing the fishing possibilities as a yearly *ad hoc* exercise based on annual scientific advice and political considerations;

[1] OJ L 344 of 20.12.2008, p. 6; proposal: COM (2008)240 final dated 6.5.2008.

- **Option 2**: freezing or gradually reducing fishing pressure in view of the insufficient knowledge about the biological status of the stock;
- **Option 3**: management plan; sub-options relate to the different biological indicators and management tools available. In particular, management by technical measures or effort regulation is considered, and management by output-constraints. Management by output-constraints is being preferred, and here a harvest rule based on a share of the total spawning stock size is being discussed, as well as a harvest rule based on the trend in the egg abundance. The latter is retained as the preferred sub-option. To this sub-option, possible complementary elements relating to catch stability, stock decline and control are being presented.

The service has undertaken a basic simulation of the mid-term economic effects, at the aggregated fleet level, on the profit margins of the two options retained (option 1 and 3). It shows that the difference is marginal, and that Option 3 might even have a slightly more beneficial effect in relative terms. The presented impact assessment compares the possible scenarios and comes to the conclusion that the most suitable is the one that consists of proposing a long-term management plan, which sets TACs stable for 3 years according to a harvest control rule based on a precautionary advice for the harvest level adjusted by a trend that reflects the tri-annual results of egg surveys.