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CC SUD
MR Jean-Marie Robert
6, rue Alphonse Rio
56100 Lorient
France

Subject: On-board processing of pelagic sharks

Your ref.: SWW AC recommendation n° 102

Dear Mr Robert,

Thank you for the SWW AC recommendation n° 102 in relation to the on-board processing of pelagic sharks. First of all, allow me to draw your attention to the fact that the Commission report on the operation of regulation (EC) n° 1185/2003, that you refer to in your letter, was adopted in April¹.

We share your opposition to the practice of fishing for surface sharks, for the sole or main purpose of selling shark fins, resulting in the non-use of shark bodies. I wish to reassure you that the Commission actively promotes the ban on the finning of sharks and the policy of naturally attached fins, both in international fora and within the framework of its bilateral relations, in order to improve conservation and the management of these fish species and to guarantee that all stakeholders are on an equal footing. The continuous efforts of the Commission have contributed to a significant increase in the number of countries that have banned finning and adopted a policy of naturally attached fins. These efforts have also contributed to the recent adoption of this policy by the North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC). The Commission will continue to work so that this success is repeated in the other Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs).

To respond to the concerns expressed by the industry, when regulation n° 1185/2003 was revised, partial slicing was introduced for the purpose of facilitating processing and storage. In your letter, you maintain that this arrangement has had harmful effects on the industry. However, the economic analysis of the fleet with significant catches of sharks, performed by the Commission and the STECF departments, suggests that the poor economic performance is probably linked to other factors or to pre-existing economic problems. Indeed, this analysis indicates that a large segment (by number of vessels and jobs) can continue their activity while producing reasonable profit margins.

¹ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/fr/ALL/?uri=COM:2016:207:FIN>

This being the case, we are very conscious of your concerns in relation to the on-board processing of sharks and the cost for the vessels involved and we will continue to closely monitor the situation and its economic consequences. At the same time, I would like to draw your attention to the fact that the EMFF can also support investment for the purpose of assisting fishermen in adapting to the new situation, as for example, the acquisition of equipment to eliminate, or at least reduce, unwanted catch, or to improve on-board working conditions and safety. However, such measures should first of all be introduced and detailed in the operational programmes of the Member States involved.

The ban on removing shark fins complies with scientific opinion, as well as with international recommendations². In effect, it is generally admitted that the landing of sharks with their fins “naturally attached” is the only practice that guarantees the effective implementation of a ban on the practice of finning and cannot be brought into question at this stage.

Thank you again for this constructive contribution. If you have any additional questions, please contact Ms Evangelia Georgitsi, coordinator of the Advisory Councils (evangelia.georgitsi@ec.europa.eu; +32.2.295.04.43).

Yours sincerely,

Joao AGUIAR MACHADO

² https://stecf.jrc.ec.europa.eu/documents/43805/44833/2008-04_PLEN+08-01.pdf;
<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/fr/ALL/?uri=CELEX:52009DC0040>