

Brussels, 19/06/2019
MARE/D3-D4/PC-LC/mbe/Ares (2019)

M Aurelio Bilbao Barandica
Président du CC SUD
6, rue Alphonse Rio
56100 Lorient
France

Subject: Advice 132 on Iberian sardine fishing opportunities (divisions ICES 8c and 9a)

Dear Mr Bilbao,

The Commission takes note of SWWAC's advice 132 dated 28 July 2019 concerning the situation for Iberian sardines. It notes in particular that, according to the representatives of fishing professionals, the biomass of Iberian sardines has increased considerably since last year, contrary to what the ICES stated in its assessment of the joint Spanish-Portuguese management plan.

In your letter, you appear to be critical of the ICES for not having taken account of the results of scientific campaigns by the Spanish Oceanography Institute and the Portuguese Institute of the Sea, and express your disagreement with the fact that the ICES advocates low productivity for sardines. You propose to use an exploitation rule (HCR 6) based on medium productivity, which would allow a higher quota than the 10,799 t established by Spain and Portugal for 2019.

Allow me first of all to point out that the Commission defends the scientific examination by peers of the work and results of campaigns carried out by the national institutes ("peer review"), a task which is incumbent on ICES. Next December, the ICES will publish its advice for 2020 which will give us a complete overview of the situation for sardines and allow us to establish fishing opportunities for 2020.

As you know, the ICES assessment on 29 May 2019 shows that the current level of catches will not lead to the recovery of the stock. Only the application of HCR 3 and 4 used in their assessment will make it possible to achieve the objectives in Spain and Portugal's joint management plan, that is, to a minimum of 80% of Blim until 2023 with annual biomass growth of at least 5%. ICES also stresses that only these rules are consistent with the precautionary approach. This means that there must not be more than a 5% probability that the reproducing biomass will fall below Blim. The result would be annual catches of approximately 7000 t.

As the common fisheries policy aims for stock recovery to a sustainable level, the Commission is monitoring changes in Iberian sardines very closely and will take the necessary measures to ensure that this objective is attained, which is also essential for the fishermen and their families.

I thank the Advisory Council for the work carried out and for its commitment, and I would ask you to contact Mrs Pascale Colson, coordinator of Advisory Councils; (pascale.colson@ec.europa.eu, +32.2.295.62.73) should you require any further details regarding this reply.

Yours faithfully.

Joao AGUIAR MARCHADO

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Billiet