

EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

The Director General

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M. Aurelio Bilbao Barandica
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Subject: Assessment notice 140 of the Southern Advisory Council on Iberian Sardines

Dear Mr Bilbao Barandica,

Thank you for your contribution to the ICES assessment notice on Iberian sardines for 2021.

As you have seen, the assessment notice regarding Iberian sardines is very positive and confirms that the biomass of this important stock is in good health for the first time since 2009. The results of the spring 2020 campaigns show a clear increase in the age class, which has led to a revision of the population abundance in this year's assessment model.

In view of these positive results, ICES recommended that catches be limited to 10,871 t for 2021. Only this figure is able to satisfy the Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) obligation. Furthermore, it is based precisely on the latest positive results. The ICES notice brought forward to June instead of December allows for better management of the stock next year.

You refer to the conclusions of an ICES workshop during which, among other things, an operating rule (HCR 6) was elaborated. You conclude from this that the application of the operating rule in question would increase the catch limit to 34,410 t for 2020. Allow me to draw attention to the fact that ICES took the work of this group into account in its notice of May 29, 2019 evaluating the management plan of Spain and Portugal. On the other hand, ICES, at that time, only recommended rules 3 and 4 (see appendix) which would fulfil the conditions of the management plan to reach 80% Blim in 2023, a plan in itself much less ambitious than the MSY. HCR Rule 6 and other operating rules were not considered appropriate. They could not satisfy the management plan given the low productivity of the stock. The working group to which you refer also indicated that HCR Rule 6 does not correspond to the ICES precautionary approach if productivity remains low.

ICES considers the productivity of this stock to still be low and the fishing pressure of 0.032 is considered to deliver the maximum sustainable yield (see ICES notice for 2021). Doubling the quota would mean doubling the pressure on the fishery and this would increase the risk of having to close the fishery in the future, which should be avoided at all costs. The aim is to rebuild the stock to a sustainable level in the long term.

I would like to warmly thank the CC South for the work they have accomplished as well as their commitment, and invite you to contact Ms. Pascale Colson, Coordinator of the Advisory Councils; (pascale.colson@ec.europa.eu, +32.2.295.62.73) for any further information on this response.

Yours faithfully.

Charlina VITCHEVA

Appendix: Evaluation of the ICES Spanish/Portuguese Management Plan for Iberian Sardines