

Atlantic and North Sea: Council agrees 2019 fishing quotas

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Fishing opportunities at the EU

Next year the number of **fish stocks** managed at maximum sustainable yield (**MSY**) **levels** will rise to **59**, and there will be additional protection for the **European eel**. At the same time EU fishermen in the Atlantic and the North Sea will be able to **increase** their **catches** of a number of **healthy stocks**.

After very intense negotiations, the **Council reached agreement** on **2019 catch limits** for the main commercial fish stocks in the area. The agreement is based on a strong commitment to the objectives of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP): environmental, economic and social sustainability.

As of 1 January 2019 we finally say goodbye to the wasteful practice of discarding fish. This is a milestone for the reformed Common Fisheries Policy, but also a challenge for our fishermen in basins like the Atlantic and North Sea. I am glad to say that today's agreement takes this challenge fully into account and provides good solutions which address the socio-economic and environmental sustainability of EU fisheries.

Elisabeth Köstinger, Austrian Federal Minister for Sustainability and Tourism and President of the Council

The Council decided in particular to **increase catches for a number of stocks**, including plaice in Skagerrak/Kattegat, the Southern hake stock, Western and Southern horse mackerel, cod, sole and plaice in the Irish Sea, and sole and megrim in the Bay of Biscay. **Decreases** were also agreed for **some stocks**.

The issue of **choke species** in mixed fisheries, i.e. species with a low quota that can cause a vessel to stop fishing even if it still has quota for other species, was addressed through **enhanced inter-area and inter-species flexibility**. Moreover a **new quota exchange mechanism** was created for member states without a quota for by-catches in five fisheries: cod in the Celtic sea and west of Scotland, whiting in the Irish sea and west of Scotland, and plaice in the south-western part of area 7.

The Council decided to further protect **European eel** by extending the mandatory closures agreed for 2018 to recreational fisheries and glass eel fisheries. These measures will cover brackish waters such as estuaries, coastal lagoons and transitional waters, and will ensure consistency with the measures on eel in the Mediterranean Sea.

Finally concerning **northern seabass**, commercial fisheries will remain prohibited with some exceptions, taking into account the positive developments reflected in the scientific advice. It was decided that allowed catches would increase to 5.5 tonnes/vessel for hooks and line fishery, to 400kg for two months for trawlers, to 210 kg for seines, and 1.4 tonne per year for fixed gillnets.

For **recreational fisheries** the “bag limit” stays at 1 fish per day but for 7 months.

Background

The Council agreement largely confirmed the initial Commission proposal, which established fishing opportunities in the form of **yearly total allowable catches** (TACs) and **quotas** by fish stocks in the different fishing zones, and fully respects scientific advice. TACs and quotas concern stocks that the EU manages either **autonomously or jointly with third countries**, for instance with Norway in the North Sea and the Skagerrak, or through agreements reached in the framework of Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs).

Based on the scientific advice provided by the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (**ICES**), the Commission had proposed for 2019 to: (1) increase or keep current catch limits for 62 stocks, (2) reduce it for 22 stocks, and (3) set new by-catch quotas at low level for 8 stocks so as to reduce the fishing pressure. The Commission had also proposed a set of measures for **northern seabass** to allow higher catches for hooks and line fishery and a bag limit for recreational fisheries.

One of the main objectives of the reformed Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) is to ensure high long-term fishing yields (**maximum sustainable yield**) by 2020 at the latest. In December 2017, 53 stocks were already fished at MSY levels.

Together with MSY, another milestone of the reformed CFP is to reduce unwanted catches through the **landing obligation** (i.e. the prohibition to discard certain stocks at sea) which enters into **full application** as from **1 January 2019** for all stocks under catch limits.

The setting of TACs and quotas is an annual management exercise decided upon by the Council in accordance with Article 43(3) of the TFEU. It takes place in parallel with the adoption of fishing opportunities in the Black Sea, and is preceded by a similar TAC setting exercise on deep sea fish stocks in November (every second year), and on Baltic Sea stocks in October.

Next steps

This regulation will be adopted through a written procedure, following finalisation by the legal/linguistic experts.

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