

Cod and hake Recovery plans



Cod stocks are still under too much fishing pressure.

In quick succession, the European Commission has presented two recovery plans for certain stocks of cod (6 May) and hake (27 June). Depending on how quickly they are adopted by the Council of Ministers, the measures could enter into force from 2004. In addition to addressing the specific characteristics of the two fisheries, the plans constitute the first practical application of the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy adopted last December. They are based on an identical long-term approach aimed at protecting resources and leading to the sustainable exploitation of stocks.

On the basis of scientific advice, the Commission has been sounding the alarm over the state of certain stocks, particularly cod, for several years now. In spite of emergency measures decided at European level, catches by Community fleets are still higher than the reproductive capacity of the stocks concerned. So much so that some have fallen well below critical biological thresholds and are even threatened with collapse (see illustration p.7). In the absence of a decision by Member States on proposed recovery measures, it has not been possible so far to address any but the most urgent situations. But the short-term measures taken over the years have not produced the expected results. They will thus be abandoned in favour of a more comprehensive and long-term approach based on multiannual measures.

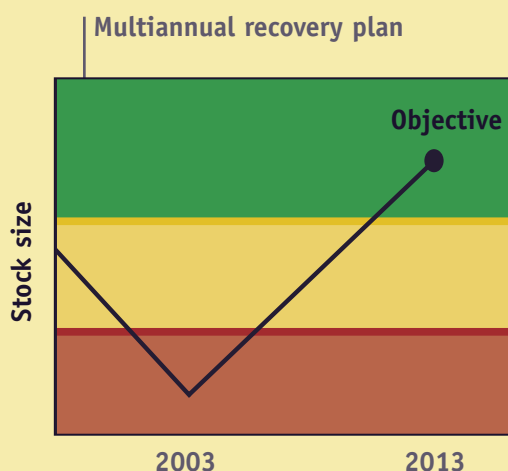
These measures were based on scientific findings and established following a wide consultation of operators in the fisheries sector. The International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) and the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) issued several opinions. Regular meetings were held with the Advisory Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture (ACFA). The European Commission also met with representatives of the Member States and of the sector on a number of occasions.

Target figures

Based on these consultations, the Commission tabled the first recovery plan - for cod - on 6 May last. What sets it apart: its long-term and quantitative objectives.

For example, to safeguard cod stocks in the North Sea, Skagerrak and the Eastern Channel, minimum stock size of adult fish should amount to 70,000 tonnes. The latest assessment, made in June 2003, estimated the amount of adult fish at 35,400 tonnes...

The objective of the recovery plan is to raise this level to 150,000 tonnes on a sustainable basis. This figure is the plan's so-called 'multiannual objective', to be attained over several years through the application of conservation measures (scientific findings suggest a period of five to 10 years). Once the target figure has



been reached for two consecutive years, the cod stocks will be subject to an ordinary multiannual management plan. This multiannual objective of 150,000 tonnes was set according to the precautionary principle. It represents the level that allows these cod stocks to be exploited in a sustainable manner.

The areas targeted by the plan are the Kattegat, Skagerrak, North Sea, Eastern Channel, west of Scotland and Irish Sea.

TACs and fishing effort

To reach the plan's objectives, two types of measures are introduced: a reduction in total allowable catches (TACs) and a limitation of fishing effort.

TACs – While TACs will continue to be fixed yearly on the basis of scientific advice, they will be so in the context of the multiannual recovery plan and their level will be set with the purpose of contributing to the objective of the plan. The principle underpinning the level of TACs for cod is to achieve a 30% annual increase in stocks of adult fish. But to avoid abrupt annual fluctuations and provide a certain degree of stability for fishermen, changes in TACs from one year to the next may not exceed 15%. The recovery plan for cod, a species caught in mixed, non-targeted fisheries, will also affect TACs for other fish caught together with cod (particularly whiting, haddock and flat fish).

Fishing effort – Catch restrictions (TACs) and the technical measures that until now have made up the main management instruments in the fisheries sector have unfortunately not succeeded in regulating the fishing mortality of cod stocks. Since cod is caught with other species, experience shows that even when TACs have been used up, cod are still taken as by-catches in other fisheries where TACs are still open. So cod are still caught (and either landed illegally or discarded at sea), which

KW-DAY: A MEASURE OF FISHING EFFORT

In its proposed recovery plans for stocks in danger of collapse, the Commission quantifies fishing effort in terms of kilowatt-days. Under the plans, each Member State would receive a total number of kilowatt-days – or authorised fishing days per year – that it would have to distribute among the vessels of its fleet. Once the days are spent, all fishing activities are stopped even if TACs are still open. And inversely, when TAC levels are reached, fishing must stop regardless whether kW-days are still available or not.

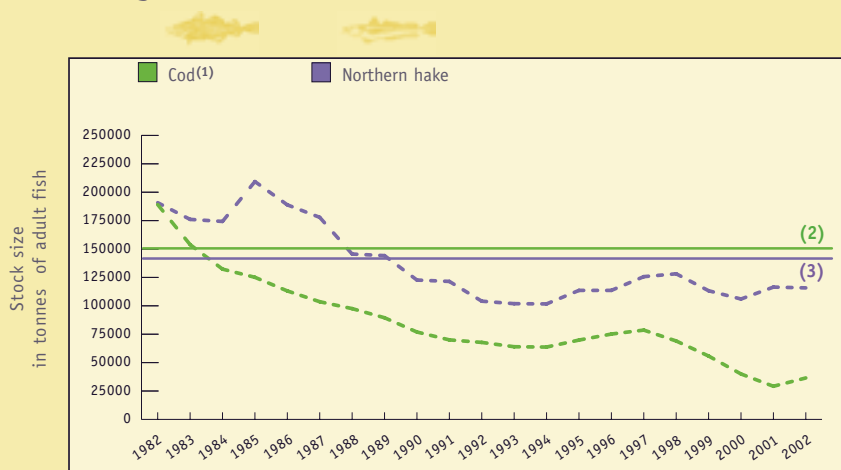
On what basis will the Commission determine the share of each Member State?

The Commission asked all Member States to draw up a list showing, for each vessel having landed cod during the years 2000, 2001 and 2002, the number of days out of port multiplied by the vessel's engine power in kilowatts. This figure gives a precise assessment of the fishing effort deployed by the relevant fleet segment in each country.

The Commission then establishes, on the basis of a mathematical formula, the number of kilowatt-days needed by the European fleet to take the established level of authorised catches. Finally, the total number of days is distributed among Member States in proportion to the fishing effort reported between 2000 and 2002. Kilowatt-days are transferable from one vessel to another within the same fishing area, but never between different fishing areas.

depletes the stock further. Consequently, fishing effort has to be managed as well. In other words, the number of days vessels can spend fishing must be limited. This is why the recovery plan proposes a new fishing effort control system based on a new unit of measure: kilowatt-days (see box). Each Member State concerned will be granted a number of kilowatt-days per year corresponding to the time the vessels of its fleet can spend at sea.

Endangered stocks



- (1) Cod in the North Sea, Eastern Channel and Skagerrak
 (2) Objective of the cod plan
 (3) Objective of the hake plan

Source : ICES

Tighter controls

But what good would this set of measures do without **better monitoring, more effective inspections and tighter controls?** The CFP reform already establishes new control instruments - such as extending satellite vessel monitoring -, encourages co-operation between different control authorities and recommends uniform penalties throughout the European Union. The new CFP also gives wider powers to Community inspectors. But the Commission is now proposing specific measures under the cod and hake recovery plans, on top of what already exists.

These obligations essentially concern landings on Community territory. Once catches of cod and hake exceed one tonne, captains must give prior notification to the authorities of the Member State where they wish to land: the place of landing, time of arrival, quantities of cod aboard and quantities to be landed or transferred to other vessels. Over two tonnes, in addition to prior notification, vessels must land in a designated port. The Commission also establishes specific conditions for the weighing and transport of landed fish and provides for the development and implementation of specific inspection plans encouraging co-operation and co-ordination between Member States.

Accompanying measures

All these measures, in addition to the depletion of cod stocks and of related species, will inevitably lead to a decline in the earnings of certain vessels. This is why the CFP reform has provided for additional support for the vessels affected. A scrapping fund has been introduced to help Member States finance the scrapping of certain vessels. It comes on top of amounts already available under the FIGF for the 2000-2006 period for vessel scrapping (see box).

Hake too

As for hake, the threat to stocks seems less immediate. But there is every reason to believe, especially considering the size of catches today, that if nothing is done soon the situation will become as critical as for cod. The European Commission therefore proposed on 27 June last a recovery plan for Northern hake based on the same principles and general philosophy as that for cod. Geographically, the area concerned matches that for cod, plus the Western Channel, the Celtic Sea, west of Ireland and Bay of Biscay. For all these areas, the objective is to raise stock levels of adult fish to at least 143,000 tonnes, safely above the critical level of 103,000 tonnes. As for the cod recovery plan, the precautionary principle and sustainable management will underpin every decision.

TACs will be established on the basis of scientific assessments in such a way as to allow stocks to grow 10% a year. And, as with cod, variations in TACs from one year to the next may not exceed 15%. If stocks are estimated to fall below the critical level, however, stricter measures will be proposed, as in the cod recovery plan.

Other measures – such as limitations of fishing effort and monitoring and control – of the hake recovery plan are similar to those established under the plan for cod.

ACCOMPANYING MEASURES

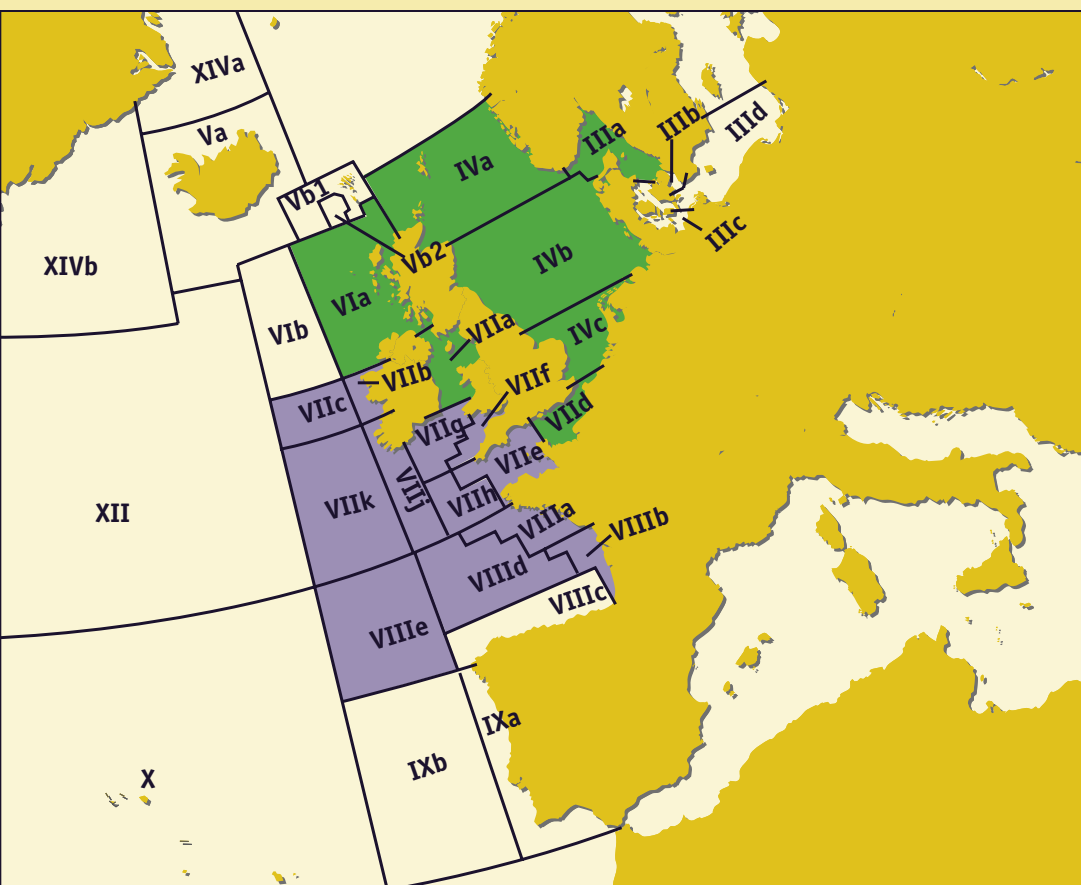
The recovery plans will necessarily lead to a decline in activity and thus in earnings for certain vessels. This is why, in addition to aid available under the FIGF (Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance), accompanying measures are also provided for in the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy.

A scrapping fund¹ was created to enable Member States to assist those fleets hit hardest by the recovery plans. This fund comes on top of vessel scrapping measures already available under the FIGF for the period 2000-2006. The money will be used for the scrapping of vessels whose fishing effort must be cut by at least 25% as a result of a recovery plan. Premiums for the definitive withdrawal of such vessels will thus be 20% higher than those already available under the FIGF.

The CFP reform has also widened the scope of existing FIGF measures. In particular, aid for vessel owners and crewmembers whose activities must be temporarily suspended can be extended. When such interruptions are due to the implementation of a recovery or a management plan, or to emergency measures decided by the Commission, annual aid can be extended by one year. In addition, FIGF support measures for retraining fishermen in activities outside the sector have been extended to professionals wishing to diversify their activities while continuing to fish on a part-time basis.

Since the start of the 2000-2006 period, the Member States have set aside for socio-economic measures only 3% of the total € 3.7 billion allocated to the FIGF. The Commission is therefore encouraging the Member States to increase this percentage, and even to make use of other Community Structural Funds available.

(1) Council Regulation (EC) No 2370/2002 of 20 December 2002.



Areas¹ covered by the two recovery plans

■ Hake
■ Cod + hake

(1) Distribution of stocks according to ICES.

Other plans

In the coming months, the Commission will be proposing other multiannual recovery plans for stocks already below critical biological thresholds: southern stocks of hake, sole in the Western Channel and Bay of Biscay, haddock in Rockall and Norway lobster in the Cantabrian Sea and off the Iberian Peninsula. Their common objective is to protect fish resources and to guarantee the future of fishing.

The Commission's proposals must first be debated by the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers before the recovery plans can enter into force.

'STOCKS IN A DEPLORABLE STATE'

Hans Lassen, Fisheries Adviser at the ICES¹ and Secretary of the ACFM², believes that the cod and hake stocks covered by the recovery plans are in a deplorable state and have reached historically low levels. He is especially concerned by the systematic decline of these stocks over the past 20 years. But scientists and fishermen do not always agree on the data put forward by scientific research. *'There is actually not a big difference in opinion between fishermen and scientists on the levels and the general trends of fish stocks. The real difference comes in the conclusions to be drawn from these trends and levels. ICES believes it is possible to rebuild these stocks by fishing less while fishermen are more prone to say that fishing less won't have much impact on stocks. That is my interpretation of the major difference in attitudes.'*

(1) International Council for the Exploration of the Sea.

(2) ICES Advisory Committee on Fisheries Management.

FROM INTERIM TO LONG-TERM MEASURES

The recovery plans for cod and hake stocks threatened with collapse, once adopted by the Council of Fisheries Ministers, will replace the interim measures approved by the Council in December 2002. So far, the Commission has proposed the following measures:

- **12/1999:** the Council of Ministers cuts by over 50% total allowable catches (TACs) for cod in the Irish Sea.
- **02/2000:** to protect cod during the spawning period, the Commission establishes a protected area in the Irish Sea for 10 weeks.
- **12/2000:** the Council significantly reduces TACs for 2001 for cod and Northern hake. In a joint statement, the Council and Commission call for recovery measures for these stocks to be put in place as soon as possible.
- **02/2001 - 02/2002 - 02/2003:** the Commission re-establishes the protected area in the Irish Sea for 10 weeks. Similar measures are approved for cod in the North Sea and west of Scotland.
- **03-06/2001:** the Commission introduces an increase in mesh size (from 110 mm to 120 mm) for cod trawling as well as technical and control measures for Northern hake.
- **12/2001:** the Commission proposes a stock recovery plan for cod and Northern hake.
- **03/2002:** additional technical measures for Northern hake are adopted.
- **12/2002:** in the absence of a decision on the recovery plan proposed by the Commission in December 2001, the Council adopts temporary measures for cod. These include reduced fishing quotas and the first-ever fishing effort restrictions.
- **05/2003:** the Commission presents the recovery plan for cod in the North Sea, Skagerrak, Kattegat, west of Scotland, Eastern Channel and Irish Sea.
- **06/2003:** the Commission presents the recovery plan for Northern hake from the Bay of Biscay to the Kattegat.



Reducing TACs and fishing effort: necessary measures.

COD: A BRIEF HISTORY OF A GRAND FISHERIES

Cod (*Gadus morhua*) was already caught and salted by the ancient Nordic peoples, particularly the Vikings. From the Middle Ages onward, salt and fresh water fish became an important part of the diet. An ever growing European population and the prescriptions of christian religion, requiring 150 days a year abstention from meat, stimulated the demand for fish: fishing for herring and cod intensified.

The legendary aspects of cod fishing date back to the 15th century. The first vessels were fitted out for months at sea in the North Atlantic and off the coasts of Newfoundland. In the 17th century, fishermen discovered Iceland's shoals. The Portuguese, French, English and Dutch divided up the valuable shoals of fish and fishing was regulated by international treaties... Every year, from mid-winter to early spring, hundreds of caravels, schooners or three-masters set out for six to eight months of fishing and travelled thousands of kilometres from shore. Crews were made up not only of seafarers but also of a good many farmers who returned to their fields once back home, if they made it home, that is... In these cold and treacherous seas, where they had to work at a furious pace, the crede was 'Fish or die!'

For centuries, cod fishing techniques remained unchanged. Until 1900, cod was caught only by sailing vessels; then steam trawlers paved the way to industrial fishing.

