



COMMUNITY FISHERIES CONTROL AGENCY

Cod in the North Sea and adjacent waters

Introduction

Cod has been over fished for many years, in that the fishing mortality has been much too high to ensure sustainable fishery. This has been in part a consequence of the overcapacity of European fishing fleets; poor controls on landings have played a part too.

Although reductions in TAC were made, the end effect was not enough to stop the cod falling into a rapid decline in the late 1990s. This was due to a combination of excessive fishing pressure and over-quota catches, some of which were being discarded.

State of the stock

ICES classify the stock as being at risk of being harvested unsustainably and suffering reduced reproductive capacity. The 1999-2004 year classes are all estimated to have been well below average; the 2005 year class is estimated to be more abundant, but well below average levels. This requires cautions for future years.

Management objectives

The main objective is to keep Spawning Stock Biomass (SSB) above 70 000 tonnes and fishing mortality at 0.4. If the stock is 150 000 t, there is a recovery plan with the aim to increase the SSB.

Obviously the CFCA will implement the decision taken by the Council of Ministers on a proposal of the Commission to ensure the appropriate implementation of the Council decision.

Management considerations

The cod is usually fished in associated demersal fisheries by several fleets with different allowed mesh sizes, which causes problems for the stakeholders and the authorities in the management of quotas and effort.

In the past years, emergency measures have been taken and a recovery plan has been implemented with the aim of reversing the declining trend in SSB and increasing the spawning stock. Even if these measures may have contributed to some reduction in fishing mortality, they have not led to any increase in the SSB.

The reported landings in 2006 were 26 700 t and the estimated discards in 2006 were 8100 t, giving a total of 34 800 t.

During the last five years an average of 83% (87% in 2006) of the international landings in numbers consisted of juvenile cod aged 1-3. Because the fishery is at present so dependent on incoming year classes, fishing mortalities on these year classes is high, and 95% of a year class is taken before it has spawned for the first time.

For further information on the state of North Sea cod stocks, see the website of the International Council for Exploration of the Sea (www.ices.dk).