

EP(18)53

17th September 2018

Scientists see evidence of major progress in European fisheries

- 39 % more fish in the sea than in 2003 -

Europêche has welcomed the clear message from the scientific community and DG MARE Director General, Mr Aguiar Machado, at Friday's "Scientific Seminar on Fisheries Science" organised by the European Commission. The scientific data presented evidenced in the North East Atlantic a drastic reduction in fishing pressure which is now stabilizing at sustainable levels. As a consequence, overexploited stocks decreased by 43% in the last decade and the proportion of stocks outside safe biological limits dropped by more than half during the same period. Fish populations have been generally increasing, reaching in 2016 biomass levels 39% higher than in 2003. The seminar also reviewed fisheries science challenges such as integrating socio-economic advice, multispecies management transition, climate change consequences and insufficient data processing.

The panel explained that many stocks have recovered and are delivering stable and sustainable catches, highlighting that the joint efforts made by the industry, institutions and scientists are paying off. This is clearly demonstrated by the fact that in the Baltic, North Western and South Western waters, for the stocks managed by the EU alone; 95%, 94% and 90% respectively of the expected landings come from Total Allowable Catches (TACs) set in line with the Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY). In the North Sea, the situation is even better since this figure reaches 99.7% of the expected landings. On a less positive note, although adequate measures have been adopted by the Member States concerned, the Mediterranean situation is continuing to cause concern.

President of Europêche, Javier Garat, declared: *"We have heard today how stocks in many areas are being fished at sustainable levels and these positive results have to be acknowledged by the EU. Despite upbeat predictions for 2018, due to low levels of recruitment, scientific advice recommends TAC cuts for certain stocks. It is clear that no matter how well we manage our stocks, fish populations will always fluctuate. We therefore call on policy-makers to look at the big picture and set the TACs for 2019 in accordance with this positive trend."*

The seminar then assessed the challenges regarding fisheries advice. One of the main difficulties identified by the panel was the need to better understand the impact of the Common Fisheries Policy and scientific advice on the socio-economic performance of the EU fleets. A chief science officer underlined that fisheries advice is quite effective in predicting whether the fish populations increase or decrease; however when scientists change the benchmark of the stock assessment methods used, the stock size is often rescaled, making it extremely difficult for fishermen to balance their revised quota allocations with the price and market demands. In addition, the same speaker expressed the concern whether rebuilding all fish stocks at MSY levels could be counterproductive, since it could actually lead to overall lower yields. Furthermore, expert panelists agreed on the need to provide data on the quality of jobs and safety implications of the fisheries related policies.

Mixed fisheries advice was identified as an important element in the TAC setting process to better understand the nature of mixed fishery and to address the complexities of the landing obligation to the largest extent possible. However, the Commission noted that it is not an actual advice as it merely describes possible scenarios, nor a panacea since it does not resolve for instance the “choke species” problem.

Finally, the panel explained that 90% of the financial resources are being used for data collection and only 10% for data processing. It was underlined that quality data are essential for policy-making but it is equally important to adequately process and analyze data for informed policy decisions.

President of Europêche, Javier Garat, concluded: *“Scientific advice has come a long way but a great deal remains to be done. There are still many obstacles to overcome to be able to implement policies such as the landing obligation. It is clear that there was a huge gap between theory and practice, resulting in incoherent policies that the industry now is confronted with and has to endure.”*

ENDS

Press contacts:

Daniel Voces de Onaindi, Managing Director of Europêche: +32 (0)2 230 48 48 daniel.voces@europeche.org