

ICES Fisheries Advice

June 2009

The International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) has recently published its mid-year report on the state of fish stocks in the North East Atlantic, including the North Sea. This advice will inform the decisions on fishing quotas and other regulations to be made by European Fisheries Ministers at the end-of-year fisheries negotiations.

This note summarises the advice for key species of interest to the Shetland fishing fleet.

Background

The International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) is an inter-governmental organisation that coordinates and promotes marine research in the North Atlantic. Much of its work is focussed on assessing the status of fish stocks and on providing advice on their management to member governments and to the European Union.

ICES's stock assessments are based on the analysis of data from a variety of sources, including landings, fishermen's logbooks, scientific observers onboard fishing vessels, and research vessel surveys.

The European Union uses this advice to inform its annual decisions on fish quotas and other management measures for the following year.

Whitefish

The four most important whitefish species for Shetland fishermen are haddock, monkfish, cod and whiting, which together account for over 80% of the value of whitefish landed by the Shetland whitefish fleet.

In summary, for 2009, ICES is recommending decreases in haddock and whiting quotas, no change for monkfish, and an increase in cod quota.

Haddock (North Sea)

Advice for 2010	Landings in 2009	% change
38,000 tonnes	45,000 tonnes	↓ 15%

The North Sea haddock stock continues in relatively good condition, is regarded as being at full reproductive capacity and as being harvested sustainably.

However, the size of the stock continues to decline; the Spawning Stock in 2009 is estimated at just under 200,000 tonnes, compared to over 500,000 tonnes in 2002 and 2003. For this reason, and in an effort to prevent the size of the stock falling below target minimum size (140,000 tonnes), ICES is recommending a further reduction in the haddock quota for 2010. Under the EU-Norway management plan this cut would be constrained to 15%.

In 2006 the Shetland whitefish fleet landed 2,553 tonnes of haddock worth £3.3 million, 27% by weight and 23% by value of their total landings.

Monkfish (North Sea and West of Scotland)

Advice for 2010	Quota in 2009	% change
No increase in effort	16,500 tonnes	---

As in recent years, ICES has again been unable to make any formal assessment of the state of monkfish stocks, due to a lack of data on the stock and on fishing effort. The size of the monkfish stock and the level of fishing mortality remain 'unknown'.

As in 2009, ICES recommends that effort should not be allowed to increase in fisheries that catch monkfish, and that programmes to collect catch and effort data on both target and bycatch fish (such as the Scottish tallybook programme) should continue.

In the light of similar advice in 2007, the EU decided to retain the monkfish quota for 2009 at the same level as 2008 (16,500 tonnes for both the east and west coasts).

In 2007 the Shetland whitefish fleet landed 1,824 tonnes worth £4.3 million, 19% by weight and 31% by value of their total landings. Monkfish is the single most valuable species caught by the Shetland whitefish fleet.

Cod (North Sea)

Advice for 2010	Landings in 2009	% change
40,300 tonnes	34,600 tonnes	↑ 17%

The apparent recovery of the cod stock continues, although the stock is still considered to be 'overfished' and to have a 'reduced reproductive capacity'. The estimated size of the spawning stock in 2009 is just over 60,000 tonnes, (cf. 34,000 tonnes in 2006), but this remains below the minimum safe size of 70,000 tonnes, and the minimum desirable size of 150,000 tonnes.

Nevertheless, the management plan in place for North Sea cod would allow an increase in quota of 17% for 2010.

In 2007 the Shetland whitefish fleet landed 1,202 tonnes of cod worth £2.5 million, 13% by weight and 18% by value of their total landings.

Whiting (North Sea)

Advice for 2010	Landings in 2009	% change
< 7,400 tonnes Total catch; < 5,900 tonnes for human consumption	19,000 tonnes	↓ >61%

As in recent years, ICES has again been unable to make any formal assessment of the state of the whiting stocks. Although the estimated size of the spawning stock in 2009 is slightly above that in 2008, it remains close to a historical low.

For this reason, and on the basis of the precautionary principle, ICES is recommending a substantial reduction in the whiting quota. (Although whiting quotas have been reduced substantially in recent years the reductions have not previously been as large as those recommended by ICES).

In 2007 the Shetland whitefish fleet landed 1,118 tonnes of whiting worth £1.2 million, 12% by weight and 9% by value of their total landings.

Pelagic Species

Pelagic catches by Shetland fishermen are dominated by herring and mackerel, which together accounted 89% of the value of landings by the Shetland pelagic fleet in 2006.

Herring (North Sea)

Advice for 2009	Quota in 2008	% change
164,000 tonnes	171,000 tonnes	↓ 4%

The size of the North Sea herring stock has declined in recent years and ICES has again classed it as being 'overfished'. Accordingly, they are recommending a further small reduction in herring quota in 2009.

In 2007 the Shetland pelagic fleet landed 17,714 tonnes of herring worth £5.0 million, 21% by weight and 15% by value of their total landings.

Mackerel (North Sea & Atlantic)

Advice for mackerel will be issued later in the year.

What Happens Next ?

ICES will issue updated advice later in the year (usually in October), although this is unlikely to differ substantially from this advice.

On the basis of this advice the European Commission will consider and formulate its proposals for the European Council of Fisheries Ministers' meeting in December.

Further Information

Detailed ICES Advice for Individual Species is available at:

<http://www.ices.dk/advice/icesadvice.asp>

For further information please contact me.

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