

Lowri Evans
Director General
DG Fisheries and Maritime Affairs
DG MARE
Rue de la Loi 200
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22nd of July 2010

Subject: NWW RAC Advice on Porbeagle Discard Reduction Plan

Dear Director General Mrs. Evans

We have had to accept that the current ICES' advice is that Porbeagle Shark stocks are currently depleted and that management measures to rebuild populations to safe biological levels are a legitimate priority for fisheries managers and ministers.

However, we think that the measures that have been adopted are neither appropriate nor fit for purpose, if the objective is to reduce fishing mortality on Porbeagle Shark to give stocks an opportunity to recover.

Therefore, whilst we share with you the aim of reducing fishing pressure on Porbeagle, and can even understand the short term pressures which led the Council of ministers to adopt an essentially cosmetic measure in the form of a prohibition on landing these sharks, we are frustrated that the concrete measures put in place will do nothing to rebuild or protect Porbeagle Shark populations and will in practice retard the development of a meaningful conservation policy for Porbeagle.

The basis for these comments lies in our practical experience and knowledge of the fisheries involved. The salient points are:

- Porbeagle are uneven and generally unpredictable in their distribution for most of the year
- As a result, although not targeting Porbeagle, on occasion gill-netters targeting species such as Hake and Pollack can on occasion catch individual shark or a small group of sharks (often thought to be chasing feed fish such as mackerel)
- This pattern of catches is reflected in the landings statistics (Cornish Fish Producers Organisation from the UK figures by fleet sector attached for information) where generally very low levels of unavoidable by-catch are interrupted by occasional by- catch.

All this demonstrates that a prohibition on landings is an inadequate management response to the problems confronting Porbeagle Shark.

The result of a prohibition on landings can be described quite precisely:

- A discard problem where previously there was none
- No reduction in fishing mortality on Porbeagle
- An alienated and frustrated fishing industry obliged to discard a not completely insignificant part of their earnings for no comprehensible reason

Alternative

Clearly, this is an unacceptable position for all concerned. Stocks of a vulnerable species remain under pressure; fisheries managers see their measures fail to deliver a reduction in mortality that will be a prerequisite for improvement in the stock, ministers remain under pressure from environmental organizations to “do something”; fishermen can only shake their heads in despair at yet another irrationality in the management system.

Away from the immediate pressure of the Council and the year end negotiations, we believe that it is possible to design an approach that at least has the potential to deliver recovery of Porbeagle populations by effecting a reduction in fishing mortality

Proposal

We propose the following:

- No targeted Porbeagle fisheries
- Replacement of the landing prohibition by a monitoring programme to minimize by-catch of Porbeagle where possible and maximize return of live incidental by-catch
- Retention of the 200cm maximum landing size, if felt necessary
- Release and recording of data on numbers, size and position of live Porbeagle (verified by observer coverage if necessary)
- Continual monitoring of by-catch rates and if increasing significantly immediate remedial action to be taken

Benefits:

- Reduce discarding of dead fish
- Maximize return of live fish
- Improve scientific data or understanding of these species as basis for the design of effective Porbeagle avoidance strategies
- Encourage fishing industry collaboration or partnership to trial and test technical, spatial and temporal means of reducing unwanted Porbeagle by-catch
- Build in step wise fashion an effective rather than cosmetic approach

This is an issue which requires immediate resolution to avoid any further unnecessary discarding and alienation of the fishing industry. Therefore we would suggest an urgent meeting of Commission policy officials and scientific advisors to develop a practicable management regime as soon as possible.

I trust that you will appreciate the genuine nature of these proposals and assist us in addressing this issue as a matter of urgency.

Yours faithfully,

Sam Lambourn
NWWRAC Chairman