
Fisheries Council agrees on Control regulation and on 2010 fishing possibilities for the Baltic Sea

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The Fisheries Council meeting in Luxembourg on 19 and 20 October took a number of important decisions and made headway on a number of issues. The discussions were dominated by the Commission's proposals for a root-and-branch reform of the CFP control framework and for fishing possibilities in the Baltic Sea for 2010.

The Control Regulation, proposed last November, has now been approved by Council and will enter into force on 1 January 2010. Delays have been agreed for a number of articles to enable Member States to be fully prepared to implement all measures in the Regulation. Ministers resolved the final outstanding issues, including a degree of harmonisation of sanctions, a new penalty points system, a payback system for overfished quotas and provisions to allow for the suspension of Community assistance in the event of non-compliance by Member States with the agreed control provisions. Furthermore, it was agreed that, for now, recreational catches will not be counted against national quotas. The new control system will provide Europe with the level playing field required to usher in a much-needed culture of compliance in the fisheries sector.

Council also reached political agreement on the Commission proposal on fishing possibilities for fish stocks in the Baltic Sea for 2010. On the positive side, with scientific advice showing that cod stocks in the Baltic are starting to recover, Council was able to agree on total allowable catches (TAC) increases of 15% and 9% for the eastern and western cod stocks respectively.

On the less positive side, the western herring stock continues to cause serious concern, prompting Council to agree on a 16.5% reduction. Furthermore, a 12% reduction for the central herring stock and 5% reductions for sprat and for salmon in the Main Basin were also approved. The changes in TACs agreed in Luxembourg will contribute to the ultimate aim of achieving the long-term sustainable exploitation of stocks.

Following indications that discarding in the Baltic Sea may be on the rise, Council approved a high-grading ban for next year throughout the Baltic Sea, together with other selectivity measures to avoid discards.

Council also discussed the annual consultations with Norway for 2010, which will begin in Bergen in mid-November. This year's negotiations are likely to present a number of challenges. The discussion in Council will enable the Commission to secure the support of Member States to achieve a balanced agreement with Norway.

Under AOB items, Council discussed renewal of the fishing fleet under the EFF Regulation, in response to a request from Lithuania and Cyprus. Commissioner Borg reminded ministers that EFF funding opportunities do not allow for the construction of new vessels. The Commissioner also briefed ministers on the state of play on bluefin tuna ahead of the annual meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) in November. He also announced that, following the recent tragic events in Guinea, he would be initiating the procedure to withdraw the Commission proposal to ratify the Fisheries Partnership Agreement with Guinea.