

## PRESS RELEASE

### Ministers gamble with deep-sea stocks

Brussels, 30 November 2010. At the Fisheries Council meeting which concluded last night, Fisheries Ministers gambled that deep-sea stocks will survive another two years of overfishing, adopting only minor reductions in the allowable catches for deep-sea fisheries in 2011 and 2012.

The Ministers agreed on continuation of existing catch limits for several species including blue ling, despite scientific advice to stop targeting blue ling and to generally reduce catches for all deep-sea stocks. Agreed reductions for black scabbardfish of 7.5% and roundnose grenadier of 13% in the North Western waters are less than the cuts of up to 21% that scientists advised. Although targeted fishing for grenadier in the Skagerrak/Kattegat will be stopped, no catches have in any case been recorded in this area for several years.

“Given the complete uncertainty about the sustainability of these fisheries and the indications that deep sea stocks are in a bad shape, it is far from clear that the stocks can cope with the levels of fishing agreed by the Ministers” said Monica Verbeek, Executive Director of Seas At Risk. “Ministers should have taken their commitments under several UN instruments seriously, and agree to a progressive phase out of catches unless or until measures are in place that ensure sustainable exploitation. Instead they fall into their annual habit of disregarding scientific advice and to keep on fishing, appeasing those countries that profit most. Deep water fish species are too vulnerable and their recovery too slow to sustain such a habit.”

Deep-sea species are particularly vulnerable to exploitation due to their biological characteristics and the lack of reliable data is a major problem. It is currently impossible to determine the state of most populations, let alone what catch level could be considered ‘sustainable’. Still, based on observed trends, the scientific authority for these North east Atlantic fish stocks, ICES, considered the entire deep-sea catch to come from stocks ‘outside safe biological limits’. In such circumstances, the EU’s commitments under several UN instruments require a more cautious regulation, including temporary suspension of the fishery until measures are in place that ensure sustainable exploitation.

One favourable outcome of the meeting is the ban on fishing for and landing of deep-sea sharks in 2011 with no by-catch allowance in 2012. However, without measures to avoid the by-catch of these sharks in the first place, they will continue to be caught and thrown overboard by the EU deep-sea fleet.

For more information:

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