

WRITTEN QUESTION P-4274/08
by Duarte Freitas (PPE-DE)
to the Commission

Subject: Hake and Norway lobster recovery plan

In 2005 the Commission laid down preliminary measures to manage fishing effort in the areas corresponding to Divisions VIIc (northern coast of Spain) and IXa (Galician coast and western and southern coast of Portugal, to the west of 7°23'4"). In that year the fleets and fishing gear groupings affected by the measures responded immediately by significantly scaling down their operations, compared with the average fishing effort in the preceding year (2004). Since Regulation (EC) No 2166/2005¹ entered into force, the number of fishing days, especially for vessels licensed to carry gear of one type only, has been lowered by 10% a year (Chapter III, Article 8(2)). The requirements imposed by this regulatory framework have made the situation much less stable for ill-prepared vessels, which, now that their profitability has slumped, have had to be laid up for good.

The signs of recovery in the hake stock are undeniable, both in terms of overall abundance and in terms of yield per unit of effort. The economic crisis is posing a threat to the survival of the fisheries sector on account of high fuel prices and the drop in fishing days, which have been reduced in stages for four years running; the present conjunction of circumstances is producing severely damaging effects and implies a need for a different approach to fishing effort in Spanish and Portuguese waters, bearing in mind that the existing model has gone beyond what operators can withstand.

Given that

- the Commission's target for the hake spawning stock biomass (35 000 tonnes) is 10 000 tonnes higher than the minimum reference limit defined by the ICES for this biological stock sustainability indicator;
- as regards the fishing mortality rate for hake, the figures specified ($F = 0.27$ or $F = 0.3$ in two consecutive years), which, according to the Commission, are the target that needs to be met if the annual reduction in fishing effort is to be halted, are unrealistic in view of the numbers of hake recently recorded in virtually every part of the area covered by the recovery plan. According to the ICES, a maximum mortality rate of $F = 0.55$ and a precautionary mortality rate of $F = 0.4$ would enable the maximum sustainable yield (msy) to be achieved where the hake stock is concerned,

is the Commission willing to reassess the scientific and technical soundness of the biological reference targets laid down in the hake stock recovery plan with a view to replacing them with more realistic figures reflecting the indications that the stock is regenerating?

¹ OJ L 345, 28.12.2005, p. 5.