

MED RAC OPINION ON MEDITERRANEAN SWORDFISH

The MED RAC Executive Committee adopts, through written procedure the document approved by the *ad hoc* working group on swordfish, held on March 22, 2011 in Barcelona, as requested by the EC, to monitor the stock condition and propose conservation and management measures,

Whereby

1. There is no sign indicating a dramatic decline in the Mediterranean swordfish stocks. This allows time to carry out further research to collect data on the catch and on efforts, and analyze different assessment methods, as seen in the Report of the 2010 ICCAT Mediterranean swordfish stock assessment of the SCRS.
2. The ICCAT Recommendation 2009/04 on the sustainable exploitation of Mediterranean swordfish is not easy to apply, because, at the moment, it is difficult to have a clear picture of the number of fishing vessels involved in catching swordfish in the Mediterranean basin, and it is unthinkable to propose any kind of measures concerning capacity without first having a clear census of all the fishing vessels involved in swordfish catches.

Adopts

with objections from the WWF, a number of proposals concerning, in particular, the following technical measures on the future management of swordfish fishing activities:

4.FLEET: It is important for all the Member States to make a census of the catching vessels actually engaged in fishing swordfish so that it will be validated, at a second stage, by the EU. For this purpose it is necessary to make a distinction between:

- A. Catching vessels actually engaged in active fishing swordfish, exclusively with long-lines and harpoons.
- B. Catching vessels not fishing actively (by-catch catching less than 2 tons per year)*
- C. Recreational fisheries' vessels dedicated to catch swordfish.

*objection expressed by Federcoopesca because the point 4B should address active seasonal fishing and not the by-catch one, in order to diversify it from point 5. CRPMEM LR and CNPMEM disagree with the coordinators' report on points 4/A, 4/B and 5 as they don't reflect what has been discussed in the group.

5.BY-CATCH : Taking into account that traditionally there were recorded some by-catches of swordfish from catching vessels engaged in other fishing activities in all the countries involved, it is deemed



necessary to establish a limit for by-catches of the order of 5% (by weight or/and number of pieces.) for this fishing activities and of fleet.

6.MINIMUM SIZE: taking into account some deviations in the way of measurement of the length of the swordfish as well as the need to harmonize the relative size, an agreement has been reached to propose the minimum size of 90 cm from the lower mandible to the fork with a tolerance of 10% as to the number of fish of smaller size on the overall number of swordfish of allowable size caught in each sea trip.

7.HOOKS: bearing in mind the provisions of the EC Technical Measures Regulation 1967/2006 aiming at harmonization, a more limited maximum number of hooks is being proposed and accepted, that is 2.800. Furthermore, the length of the hook cannot be less than 7 cm. It is authorized a second series of tied and not set-up fishing hooks for fishing trips of more than 2 days.

8.CLOSED FISHING SEASON: the important socio/economic impact of this issue on the sector is very strong if it is not accompanied by any parallel measure of aid. The participants ask for this issue to be taken into account by the Commission since this fleet has received a double blow both for the fishing of blue-fin tuna and for the fishing of swordfish.

There are various points of view as to a ban or a temporary seasonal ban on fishing as well as to whether this ban should concern the type of fishing or the fishing gear ("long-line"). Finally an agreement is reached on the maintenance of the existing status quo and on the continuation of the ban for the months of October and November.

9.DECREASE OF THE FISHING CAPACITY AND TOTAL ALLOWABLE CATCHES (TAC): All the participants arrived at the conclusion that it is impossible to conduct a study on whether it is possible to arrive at a certain decrease of the fishing capacity since today's situation as to fishing in the Mediterranean is unknown. As a result and since we do not have this "picture", we cannot examine this probability.

Several participants consider that this type of fishing does not need the establishment of TAC. As a result it is necessary to wait for the results of the implementation of the measures above.

Furthermore, it is necessary to improve the transfer of data from all the member countries practicing this type of fishing. The operation of this sector is rather problematic and this prevents the adoption of any decision concerning these two measures.

Let us add, that any decision on TAC would be also problematic since it would validate data from a fishing activity that has been practiced by illegal fleets, as an example the case of Morocco that shall prohibit, by the end of the year, fishing with driftnets.

10.GENERAL REMARKS : The participants confirm that there is a need to base themselves from now on reliable and solid data concerning fishing vessels and catches.

In the same framework and given the characteristics of the Mediterranean, it is necessary both for this and for the other types of fishing that are practiced in these waters, to start a harmonization process of all the legislations both of the community and the extra community countries who have fishing activities. We should not limit ourselves to the adoption of common management plans.

