

Conservation of fish resources: recovery of the Northern hake stock

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The committee adopted the report by Dominique SOUCHET (Ind, F) amending the proposal under the consultation procedure. It took the view that it would be excessive to introduce a recovery plan for the Northern hake stock and that, in line with the most recent advice from the ICES Advisory Committee for Fisheries Management (ACFM), implementation of a TAC management plan would be enough to ensure sustainable fishing of this species. The committee therefore adapted the text accordingly and deleted a large number of provisions where appropriate, including the article on the setting of TACs in exceptional circumstances which, it said, would seriously disturb business. Taking account of the most recent ICES data on the state of the biomass, the committee said that the target figure for increasing the quantities of mature fish of the Northern hake stock should be 140 000 tonnes rather than 143 000 tonnes as proposed and that the TAC should be set where the quantities of mature Northern hake are estimated to be equal to or above 100 000 tonnes rather than 103 000 tonnes. The management plan should be based on the setting of a TAC that will generate a fishing mortality rate no higher than 0.25, rather than 0.24 as proposed. MEPs also introduced a new article on improving the assessment system, by stepping up scientific campaigns and ensuring that scientific calculations "take due account of the practical observations made by fishermen". Moreover, the Regional Advisory Councils due to be set up under Regulation (EC) No. 2371/2002 should be closely involved in drawing up the management plan and the Commission's proposed socio-economic impact study. The committee also deleted two entire chapters, Chapter IV on fishing effort limitation and Chapter V on monitoring, inspection and surveillance. It stressed again that the ACFM rejected the idea of taking drastic measures for the Northern hake stock and that there was no justification for introducing special control measures.