



PRESS RELEASE

International Council for the
Exploration of the Sea

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GOOD NEWS FOR NORTHERN HAKE AND NORWEGIAN SPRING SPAWNING HERRING - BUT SANDEEL, ANCHOVY AND NORTH SEA COD STILL DEPLETED

This Friday, the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) will release a report on the status and perspectives of some of the most important Northeast Atlantic fish stocks. The 22 international scientists of the Advisory Committee on Fishery Management (ACFM) analysed the status of commercial fish stocks in the Northeast Atlantic. The experts came to the conclusion, that the overall status of the fish stocks has not changed much from 2005 to 2006. Sustainable exploitation can be stated for Norwegian Spring Spawning herring, and there are indications of recovery of the Northern hake stock. However, there are still numerous stocks that are too heavily fished and stocks that are depleted – notably cod stocks and sandeel in the North Sea.

Martin Pastoors, ACFM Chair said today: *“It is good to see that prudent management can safeguard and rebuild the valuable resources in the sea. The Norwegian spring spawning herring stock is at a high level due to a rational exploitation strategy. Also the apparent recovery of the Northern hake stock is a positive signal. Unfortunately we have not seen clear signals of recovery for the depleted cod stocks. These stocks have a high growth potential, but the continued catches from these stocks in combination with very low recruitment have prevented a recovery.”*

Some positive developments can indeed be reported. Management plans begin to generate first improvements for Northern Hake in the Bay of Biscay and west of the British Isles. Similar plans are being developed for species such as Blue Whiting and Haddock. ICES is increasingly focusing on advice for long term management plans, thereby shifting the attention from the short-term advice to a longer-term perspective.

Another positive development relates to a change that is taking place in the involvement of those who are stakeholders of the seas. The traditional gap between scientists and fishing industry in the evaluation of the state of stocks is closing due to more active involvement of fisheries’ representatives and other stakeholders in the ICES advisory process: At this ACFM meeting there were several observers from the Regional Advisory Committees (RACs) and Client Commissions. Gerd Hubold, General Secretary of ICES said: *“The inclusion of first hand information from stakeholders at an early stage and the possibility for observers to follow the entire scientific process can yield better results and a better understanding of the scientific advice. We are very happy to see this development towards a fruitful cooperation between all those who have a stake in the conservation of the treasures of our seas”*.

The full report on fish stocks in the northeast Atlantic will be available on the ICES website as a series of pdf files at midday on 20 October 2006:
<http://www.ices.dk/committe/acfm/comwork/report/asp/advice.asp>

Some information on the upcoming results on some of the fish stocks are given below.

NORTHERN HAKE

The **Northern Hake** stock that inhabits the waters from the Bay of Biscay to the west of Ireland was depleted in the mid and late 1990s. A recovery plan was initiated and the stock now appears to have recovered to safe biological levels. The recent good recruitment has contributed to the rebuilding of the stock. ICES recommends to follow the recovery plan for 2007 and to convert it into a management plan.

HERRING

Good news on the **Norwegian spring-spawning herring**: the stock is estimated to be around 10 million tonnes. Fishing mortality for this stock is at sustainable levels and the agreed management plan appears to be working well. The advice is to follow the management plan and to allow higher catches in 2007.

NORWAY LOBSTER (Nephrops)

Scientific assessments on the state of the **Norway lobster** stock are difficult to obtain. New types of surveys are being developed for this species that lives in burrows in the seabed. The so-called TV-survey will crawl over the seabed and monitor the amount of burrows and this can be converted into an estimate of stock abundance. Although the state of the Norway lobster stocks is still uncertain, the surveys indicate for quite a number of stocks that they have been increasing since the mid-1990s. ICES advises that the effort in these fisheries should not be allowed to increase. This is specifically pertinent because some fisheries have shifted from fishing for cod to fishing for Norway lobster.

ANCHOVY

Anchovy in the Bay of Biscay is still depleted. This is a very short-lived species where the stock dynamics and catching opportunities are largely determined by the incoming recruitment. The fishery has been closed in July 2005 and July 2006. ICES recommends that the fishery remain closed and could be considered for re-opening if the 2007 spring surveys indicate high recruitment.

COD

The numerous cod stocks in the Northeast Atlantic have shown diverging developments over the past years and ICES provides separate advice for each of them.

Major cod stocks in northern areas such as the Barents Sea and around Iceland are large and productive (analyses given by ICES in May 2006, see <http://www.ices.dk>). The total catches of the northern stocks yield about 850.000 t per year (2005). In the more southern parts of the cod distribution area, a generally poor stock status prevails and fishing mortality is still high despite the lower catches. Although there are slight differences in the actual condition of those southern stocks, ICES is advising for **all southern cod stocks** (with the exception of cod in the western Baltic) that there should be no catch in 2007.

PLAICE and SOLE

Similarly to cod, the **flatfish** stocks in the North Sea are intensively exploited. The **plaice** stock has been below the recommended level for a number of years already and recruitment has been generally low. ICES advises to reduce catches of North Sea plaice in order to rebuild the stock to safe levels.

The stock of **sole** in the North Sea is also below the recommended level. The recruitment in recent years has been very low but the 2005 year class appears to be above average. The exploitation rate on sole is not sustainable and ICES advises to reduce both fishing mortality and catches of sole in 2007.

SANDEEL

Sandeel used to be a million ton fishery in the North Sea in the late 1990s. Then the stock declined and the fishery was very limited in 2005 and 2006. There has been very low recruitment in recent years and for a species like sandeel this has immediate consequences for the spawning stock. Sandeel is an important forage species for some seabirds and efforts should be made to keep biomass available as prey for these birds. ICES recommends that the fishery should remain closed until there is information available on the incoming year classes that can lead to a rebuilding of the stock.

MACKEREL AND BLUE WHITING

Northeast Atlantic **Mackerel** is harvested unsustainably. There are indications of substantial underreporting of catches. Nevertheless, the adult biomass appears to have increased over the past 3 years due to higher recruitment. ICES recommends to follow the existing management plan and to assure that all catches are monitored.

Blue whiting in the Northeast Atlantic has experienced very high recruitment in the late 1990s and early 2000s which have led to a strong increase in the stock to close to 7 million tonnes. But the catches have also increased very strongly and the stock is harvested unsustainably. The most recent recruitments are lower and the stock is now declining but is still well above the safe biological level. ICES recommends to reduce catches substantially in order to reduce fishing mortality and to take account of the decreasing stock size.

SHARKS AND RAYS

The experts reviewed the situation of several elasmobranch stocks and concluded that many of the pelagic, demersal and deepwater sharks are in a depleted state and that **no targeted fisheries should be allowed**. These species often live up to a high age and can only sustain very low exploitation levels.

Summary of the ICES advice for a number of stocks

Stock	Advice for 2006	TAC 2006	Advice for 2007
Northern hake	40 000 t	43 900 t	50 500 t.
Norwegian spring spawning herring	732 000 t	967 000 t	1 280 000 t
Cod North Sea	zero	26.500	zero
Anchovy	zero*	zero	zero*
North Sea plaice	48 000 t	57 000 t	32 000 t
North Sea sole	11 900 t	17 670 t	10 800 t
North Sea sandeel	zero*	300 000 t	zero*
Mackerel	373 000 - 487 000 t	444 000 t	390 000 - 509 000 t
Blue whiting	1 500 000 t	2 100 000 t	980 000 t

* unless recruitment improves

Additional information on the **Advisory Committee on Fishery Management (ACFM)**

The Advisory Committee on Fishery Management (ACFM) provides scientific information and advice on living resources and their harvesting. In formulating its annual advice on the management of ca. 135 stocks of fish and shellfish, ACFM uses information prepared by numerous ICES stock assessment Working Groups. ACFM consists of one scientist from each of the 20 ICES member countries along with chairs of relevant ICES science committees and observers from the European Commission, Faroe Islands/Greenland, NGO's and industry representatives from non-EU countries, and the Regional Advisory Committees (RAC).

ACFM meets twice a year (spring and late autumn) to prepare its advice, which is published annually in the ICES Advice Report series. The advice is also available in pdf format on the ICES Website at www.ices.dk

International Council for the Exploration of the Sea

ICES is the organisation that coordinates and promotes marine research in the North Atlantic. This includes adjacent seas such as the Baltic Sea and North Sea. ICES acts as a meeting point for a community of more than 1600 marine scientists from 20 countries around the North Atlantic.

Scientists working through ICES gather information about the marine ecosystem. As well as filling gaps in existing knowledge, this information is also developed into unbiased, non-political advice. The advice is then used by the 20 member countries, which fund and support ICES, to help them manage the North Atlantic Ocean and adjacent seas. The annual budget is 30 mill dkk/4 mill. €

ICES plans and coordinates marine research through a system of committees, more than 100 working groups, symposia, and an Annual Science Conference. Most meetings take place either at the ICES Headquarters in Copenhagen, Denmark, or in the member countries.

ICES has been based in Copenhagen, Denmark, since 1902. Today, we have a Secretariat of 40 staff who provide scientific, administrative and secretarial support to the ICES Community.