

9.4.2.5 EC request on protection areas for blue ling during their spawning period

Text from Commission with request

The observers referred to in Article 8 of Regulation (EC) No 2347/2002 assigned to fishing vessels present in one the areas referred to in point 7.1 shall, in addition to their task in accordance with that Article, for appropriate samples of the catches of blue ling, measure the fish in the samples and determine the stage of sexual maturity of sub-sampled fish. Member States shall establish detailed sampling protocols and collation of results.

Consequently, the Commission would like to receive some "guidelines" from ICES on possible sampling strategies and collation processes to be developed with the aim to fulfil commitments expressed under this point. Those guidelines, after having been also endorsed by STECF, would be submitted to Member States to allow them designing and implementing consistent and relevant sampling strategies.

ICES interpreted this as a request to provide draft guidelines on sampling and collating information that might be used to determine the location of spawning aggregations of blue ling.

Background

In December 2008, the EC introduced protection areas for spawning aggregations of southern blue ling in ICES Division VIa from March to May, based on information from the EU POORFISH Project and additional information collated by ICES WGDEEP in 2008.

The spatial and temporal boundaries of these protection areas were set based on the best information available at the time, but it was recognised that these areas were provisional and required fine-tuning (or addition) as and when further information becomes available.

In the absence of fisheries-independent data, the two main sources of information are likely to be from deep-water observers (deployed under EC Regulation No. 2347/2002) and from fishers. Under this EC Regulation No. 2347/2002, Member States (MS) must submit Sampling Plans to the Commission describing the level of observer coverage and the sampling activities to be carried out.

Advice

ICES advises that information on the proportions of spawning blue ling (defined as running males and females, including females with hyaline eggs) and of non-spawning blue ling (all other maturities) at length are recorded at the individual haul level, and that geographical coordinates and depth are also recorded. Sample size should be at least 50 fish at all sampled hauls. Data to be collected should, for each fish sampled, include length, sex, and whether spawning or not.

ICES recommends that the above information be made available for the period January to June for all areas in ICES Divisions Vb, VIa, and VIb in order to obtain a full overview of spawning aggregations across the known range of spawning blue ling.

ICES recommends that MS review their Sampling Plans to ensure that the maturity of sampled blue ling is recorded and that adequate sampling is carried out in, and adjacent to, the blue ling protection areas.

These data should be compiled and preserved in a database by MS, and be made available to appropriate ICES expert groups for analysis.

Fishers have expressed an interest in contributing information on spawning blue ling. ICES recommends that fishers be requested to record the presence/absence of spawning blue ling on a haul-by-haul basis and to pass this information (along with position and date) to the appropriate RAC and/or national laboratories. The collected information will be used to identify spawning grounds as well as areas where the species occurs but does not spawn.