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CONSEQUENCES OF REMOVING NEPHROPS FROM RECOMMENDATION (2) LIST

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Introduction

The North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission at their 11th Meeting (May 1973) requested a study and report on whether it is appropriate that Recommendation (2) should continue to apply to all the species listed in it, and to the areas specified, with particular reference to blue whiting and Nephrops. This matter was discussed by the Liaison Committee, which in its Report for 1974 stated:-

"166. The Liaison Committee considers that insufficient data are presently available for it to answer the Commission's question with regard to Nephrops. Members of the ICES Shellfish and Benthos Committee have already been requested to submit contributions on the Nephrops fisheries to the 1974 Statutory Meeting of ICES. The Liaison Committee is of the opinion that the position of Nephrops under Recommendation (2) should be assessed when further data have been considered by the Shellfish and Benthos Committee."

To facilitate such a consideration some of the factors involved are briefly outlined below.

Factors involved

1. At the time Recommendation (2) was framed, Nephrops was mainly a by-catch species in the fishery for white fish. It was then of minor importance. Nephrops is now the principal species captured in certain fisheries of several countries. Its exploitation has expanded and in financial terms it is comparable to the fisheries of several of the major protected white fish species. It may therefore be appropriate that Nephrops should no longer be considered as a by-catch species and that its exploitation should be regarded as a fishery in its own right. This may involve fishery regulations aimed at the optimum exploitation of the stocks.

2. While the main stocks of Nephrops occur within national waters some stocks are subject to international exploitation. The Nephrops fisheries could become more internationally exploited in the future.

3. A number of countries have regulations protecting the Nephrops stocks, for example, the use of a 70 mm minimum mesh in UK waters (with the exception of the North Irish Sea where the Nephrops fishery is associated with that of whiting) and a minimum legal landing size of about 40 mm carapace length in the Scandinavian countries.

4. In present day fisheries where Nephrops is a by-catch in the fishery for white fish the nets employed are those appropriate to the prime fishery.

In some areas nets of 50 mm mesh or less (or less than 70 mm) are used in a Nephrops fishery in which white fish are a material by-catch.

In some fisheries for Pandalus, Nephrops may at times constitute a significant by-catch.

5. Selection characteristics of nets of various mesh size used in the capture of Nephrops give results which are sometimes difficult to interpret. The available data suggest that a single courlene net of 70 mm mesh allows the escape of 50% of Nephrops of 26 mm carapace length.

6. Small Nephrops do not sell well and frequently are unsaleable.

7. Nephrops returned to the sea after capture have a low survival rate.

8. The 50% maturity size for female Nephrops is about 23 mm carapace length.

Relevant questions

1. Are conservation measures appropriate to the Nephrops fisheries in general?

2. If conservation measures are appropriate should they involve a minimum mesh size?

3. What is the effect, if any, on the conservation of other species of a Nephrops fishery using nets of 50 mm mesh or less?