

Oceana recommendation on deep-sea fishing opportunities for 2015-2016

October 2014

In advance of the Fisheries Council meeting of 10-11 November, in which fishing opportunities will be decided for deep-sea species, Oceana would like to provide Fisheries Ministers with constructive recommendations on how total allowable catches (TACs) should be set. In order to achieve the commitments of the Common Fisheries Policy, it is essential that fisheries opportunities be fixed following the scientific advice, when available, and adhering to the precautionary and ecosystem approaches.

The extreme biological characteristics of most deep-sea species make them the fish resources and ecosystems that are the poorest adapted to sustained fishing pressure, since their population productivity and recovery capacity are very limited. As a result of serious deficiencies in the management and knowledge of deep-sea fish stocks, currently only one out of 24 managed species contains a stock that is considered to be in “good condition”. The status of most managed species is unknown or raises concerns about depletion, putting the viability of the fishery and the resources at serious risk.

Oceana urges the Council to set fishing opportunities according to the following guidelines:

- ✓ Fishing opportunities should not exceed scientifically advised levels.
- ✓ Fishing opportunities should be fixed with explicit consideration of catch composition and impacts on habitats.
- ✓ Fishing opportunities should not be allocated for most vulnerable deep-sea species, like orange roughy and deep-sea sharks.

Commission proposal and Oceana recommendations

On October 3, the European Commission published its biennial proposal¹ for fishing opportunities for deep-sea species, for 2015 and 2016. While for most stocks the Commission has proposed TACs that follow scientific advice, it has failed to propose the significant reductions that were recommended by scientists for stocks of roundnose grenadier and red sea-bream. The Commission has also neglected to consider ecosystem impacts, such as catch composition and/or negative impacts on ecosystems. Oceana urges the Council to further strengthen Commission proposal considering the following recommendations:

- **Deep-sea sharks.** The Commission did not make a specific proposal because scientific advice was not available at the time the proposal was released. According to subsequent advice from ICES, the perception of the assessed species has not changed; there are continuing concerns about the depleted status of deep-sea sharks, and so scientists advise that no fisheries should be permitted for these vulnerable species.

Oceana recommendation: Fishing opportunities should not be allocated for deep-sea sharks. The list of managed deep-sea shark species should be updated and expanded to include all species known to occur in the region, particularly threatened species or those closely related to species already included on the list.

¹ COM(2014) 613 final. Proposal for a Council Regulation fixing for 2015 and 2016 the fishing opportunities for Union fishing vessels for certain Deep-sea fish stocks.

Species	Fishing area	Stock Status	Scientific adv		Comm prop		Oceana prop	
			2015	2016	2015	2016	2015	2016
Deep-sea sharks ²	V, VI, VII, VIII, IX	Depleted or concerns about depletion	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	pm	pm	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Deep-sea sharks ²	X	Depleted or concerns about depletion	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	pm	pm	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Deep-sea sharks ² , <i>Deania hystricosa</i> and <i>Deania profundorum</i>	International waters of XII	Depleted or concerns about depletion	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	pm	pm	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

- **Black scabbardfish.** Although available studies suggest that stock abundance seems to be stable, in several cases at a low level, the status of scabbardfish is considered to be unknown. For key stocks (V, VI, VII, XII and VIII, IX, X) the Commission has proposed TACs that would comply with, or nearly in the case of the second stock, the scientific advice in 2016, but not during 2015. For a third key stock, whose status is completely unknown, the Commission has not yet made a proposal.

Oceana recommendation: Scientifically-advised TACs should be set for both 2015 and 2016. In the case of the stock in Subareas V, VI VII, XII, a greater reduction than that recommended by scientists could be considered, given the associated impacts on habitats and other commercial and non-commercial species. A precautionary reduction in catches should be considered for the totally unknown stock.

Species	Fishing area	Stock Status	Scientific adv		Comm prop		Oceana prop	
			2015	2016	2015	2016	2015	2016
B. scabbardfish	I, II, III, IV	Unknown stable	*	*	9 (0%)	9 (0%)	9 (0%)	9 (0%)
B. scabbardfish	V, VI, VII, XII	Unknown stable	2802 (-29%)	2802 (0%)	3173 (-20%)	2538 (-20%)	2802 (-29%)	2802 (0%)
B. scabbardfish	VIII, IX, X	Unknown stable	2726 (-26%)	2726 (0%)	3200 (-14%)	2768 (-14%)	2726 (-26%)	2726 (0%)
B. scabbardfish	CECAF 34.1.2	Totally unknown	No advice	No advice	pm	pm	2966 (-15%)	25211 (-15%)

*Assessment area does not match with management area

- **Alfonsinos.** Two main species of alfonsinos are found in the North-East Atlantic, *Beryx splendens* and *B. decadactylus*. These species both form aggregations, and so are easily overexploited. Their status is unknown, and the general lack of data on catch composition and biological parameters are major factors limiting their assessment. The Commission's proposal is in line with the scientific advice, which is based on the data-limited approach.

Oceana recommendation: follow the Commission proposal.

Species	Fishing area	Stock Status	Scientific adv		Comm prop		Oceana prop	
			2015	2016	2015	2016	2015	2016
Alfonsinos	III, IV, V, VI, VII, VIII, IX, X, XII, XIV	Unknown	280 (-5%)	280 (0%)	280 (-5%)	280 (0%)	280 (-5%)	280 (0%)

² 'Deep-sea sharks' means the following list of species: *Apristurus* spp., *Chlamydoselachus anguineus*, *Centropristis* spp., *Centroscymnus coelolepis*, *Centroscymnus crepidater*, *Centroscyllium fabricci*, *Deania calcea*, *Dalatias licha*, *Etmopterus princeps*, *Etmopterus spinax*, *Galeus murinus*, *Haxanchus griseus*, *Oxynotus paradoxus*, *Scymnodon ringens* and *Somniosus microcephalus*.

- **Roundnose grenadier and roughhead grenadier.** Oceana welcomes the addition of roughhead grenadier to the list of managed species, although there are doubts about the inclusion of this species under the same TAC as roundnose grenadier, given that the status of roughhead grenadier is completely unknown. Oceana is critical of the Commission proposals for these species. Below comments on the main stocks:

For the key captured stock (Vb, VI, VII), biomass is considered to be around $MSY_{trigger}$. Even though it remains at roughly 30% of the estimated mean level at the beginning of the time-series, the Commission has proposed a TAC slightly lower than that advised, according to the MSY approach. This implies a small (2%) increase in stock biomass, such that the recovery of the stock to B_{MSY} (68 935 t) will take on the order of 20 years, much later than required under the CFP. This concern is also shared by the STEFC in its report³, where it recommends restricting landings in 2015 and 2016 to less than recent average of landings (1862 t), as a more appropriate risk-averse approach that would be likely to lead to a more rapid recovery.

Oceana recommendation: Oceana supports the STEFC recommendation that landings be restricted to less than 1862 t. An even greater reduction could be considered given associated impacts on habitats and other commercial and non-commercial species.

The stock in Division IIIa is stable at a very low level, and so fishing is limited to incidental captures. ICES advises that there should be no directed fishery and that by-catch should be minimised. The Commission has proposed two consecutive reductions of 20% in catches, which Oceana considers are not ambitious enough.

Oceana recommendation: Catches should be reduced by greater than 20%, and ideally, to a TAC of zero, in order to follow ICES advice that by-catch be minimised.

For the remaining stocks, there are inconsistencies between assessment areas and stock management areas, resulting in uncertainties about the proper distribution of catches advised by scientists. In these areas, broader ecosystem effects of the fisheries should be considered, in relation to the widespread use of bottom trawls.

Species	Fishing area	Stock Status	Scientific adv		Comm prop		Oceana prop	
			2015	2016	2015	2016	2015	2016
Grenadier	I, II, IV	Unknown	120*	120*	13 (0%)	13 (0%)	13 (0%)	13 (0%)
Grenadier	III	Unknown stable at low level (IIIa)	0**	0**	435 (-20%)	348 (-20%)	0 (-100%)	0 (-100%)
Grenadier	Vb, VI, VII	Around B MSY trigger***	3952 (-8%)	4019 (+2%)	3794 (-12%)	3858 (+2%)	1862 (-52%)	1583 (-15%)
Grenadier	VIII, IX, X, XII, XIV	UnknownVIII,IX,Xb,XIIa1 ,XIIb,XIIc,XIV,totally unknown Xa, XIIa2	717*	717*	2578 (-20%)	2062 (-20%)	824 (-74%)	824 (0%)

* Assessment area does not match with management area.

** Scientific advice stated that there should be no directed fishery and by-catch should be minimised.

*** Mean estimate of biomass remains at only about 30% of the estimated mean level at the beginning of the time-series (1998).

³ Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) – Review of scientific advice for 2015 – Part 2 (STECF-14-11). 2014. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, EUR 26815 EN, JRC 91541, 399 pp.

- **Orange roughy.** There have been no directed EC fisheries in the North-East Atlantic since 2010, because of the depleted status of the stocks and precautionary considerations (e.g., very low productivity). ICES advises that directed fisheries should remain closed for at least two more years, and that by-catch should be minimised.

Oceana recommendation: TACs for orange roughy should remain set at zero.

Species	Fishing area	Stock Status	Scientific adv		Comm prop		Oceana prop	
			2015	2016	2015	2016	2015	2016
Orange roughy	VI	Depleted or concerns about depletion	0* (0%)	0* (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Orange roughy	VII	Depleted or concerns about depletion	0* (0%)	0* (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Orange roughy	I, II, III, IV, V, VIII, IX, X, XII, XIV	Depleted or concerns about depletion	0* (0%)	0* (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

* Scientific advice stated that there should be no direct fishery and by-catch should be minimized

- **Red sea-bream.** The status of the different managed stocks shows a very worrying situation, as they are either below safe biological limits or in decline. For the two key captured stocks (IX and X), the Commission has proposed TACs that would comply with the scientific advice in 2016, but not during 2015. For the third managed stock (VI, VII, VIII), the Commission has proposed two consecutive reductions of 20% in catches. It should be noted that for this last stock, taken mainly as by-catch, ICES advises that there should be no directed fishery and that by-catch should be minimised.

Oceana recommendation: Scientific recommendations should be followed for both 2015 and 2016, including the recommended zero TAC for the stock in sub-areas VI, VII and VIII.

Species	Fishing area	Stock Status	Scientific adv		Comm prop		Oceana prop	
			2015	2016	2015	2016	2015	2016
Red sea-bream	VI, VII, VIII	Below possible reference points	0* (-100%)	0* (-100%)	143 (-20%)	114 (-20%)	0 (-100%)	0 (-100%)
Red sea-bream	IX	Below possible reference points	115 (-85%)	115 (0%)	300 (-62%)	115 (-62%)	115 (-85%)	115 (0%)
Red sea-bream	X	Unknown decreasing	400 (-56%)	400 (0%)	610 (-34%)	400 (-34%)	400 (-56%)	400 (0%)

* Scientific advice stated that there should be no directed fishery and by-catch should be minimised

- **Greater forkbeard.** The state of the stock is unknown, although the biomass index for two specific sub-areas (VII and VIII) indicates an increase in stock abundance during recent years. Due to this fact, scientists have recommended that landings could potentially be increased, to no more than 2628 t. The Commission has proposed a 10% increase in TACs for all stocks across all sub-areas.

Oceana recommendation: An increase in catches should only be considered for those stocks that have shown an increasing trend in the abundance.

Species	Fishing area	Stock Status	Scientific adv		Comm prop		Oceana prop	
			2015	2016	2015	2016	2015	2016
G. forkbeard	I, II, III, IV	Unknown			34 (+10%)	34 (0%)	31 (0%)	31 (0%)
G. forkbeard	V, VI, VII	Unknown uptrend (VI, VII)			2239 (+10%)	2239 (0%)	2239 (+10%)	2239 (0%)
G. forkbeard	VIII, IX	Unknown uptrend (VIII, IXa)		2628	295 (+10%)	295 (0%)	295 (+10%)	295 (0%)
G. forkbeard	X, XII	Unknown			60 (+10%)	60 (0%)	54 (0%)	54 (0%)