TORs EWG 25-06 Stock assessments in the Western Mediterranean Sea 2025: Hake in GSA 1-5-6-7

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Request to the STECF:

The hake stocks in the Western Mediterranean assessed by STECF are the most vulnerable stocks under the West Mediterranean Multiannual management plan (MAP) and are drivers of the fishing effort regime in the MAP. In 2024, the STECF advice has determined both stocks being below Blim and subjects to high overexploitation which has fed into the adoption of the 2025 Council Fishing Opportunities Regulation.

For these reasons, there has been an increased level of scrutiny on both hake stocks. STECF PLEN 24-03 identified several areas for improvement in the data. The GFCM Ad-hoc Working Group on Hake, to which STECF participated in March 2025, set out several good practices on how to improve the hake assessments in general and for Hake in GSA 1-5-6-7 and in GSA 8-9-10-11. Finally, STECF considered a technical contribution from Spain on this topic in PLEN 25-01.

On the basis of the above, STECF EWG 25-06 is requested to: (i) revise the estimation of specific input parameters ; (ii) consider the good practices suggested by the GFCM Ad-hoc Working Group on Hake (building on discussions conducted and issues identified by PLEN 25-01) aiming at overcoming some limitations in the current assessments (ToR 1); (iii) review and update the a4a model for the assessment of hake in GSAs 1-5-6-7 (ToR 2).

It is to be noted that 2 ad-hoc contracts will be conducted prior to the EGW in order to help with the data preparation of 2024 hake data for the updated stock assessment (ToR2) and input parameters for (ToR1), such as growth curves for hake.

In September EWG 25-09, this revised model(s) should be run with all available data up to 2024 to provide the most updated advice.

Considering there will be a request to GFCM to update the benchmarks in cooperation with STECF, and in line with STECF PLEN 24-03 conclusions for Hake in GSA 1,5,6, 7 and Hake in GSA 8,9,10,11 as well as discussions held in the GFCM Ad-hoc Working Group on Hake, boundaries are not under scrutiny in EWG 25-06.

TOR 1: Input Data:

- Review the series of total catch and catches at length by fleets in GSAs 1-5-6-7, and tuning indices (MEDITS survey series or other available LPUE indexes), accounting for any new data supplied by Member States not provided previously in the assessment, specifically:

- Review the quality of any new information provided by Member States regarding the series of catches or catches at length by fishing fleets for their use as input for hake in GSAs 1-5-6-7 assessment.

- Assess the quality of any new information provided by Member States regarding survey series before 2007 for their use as input for hake in GSAs 1-5-6-7 assessment.

- Assess the quality of any new information provided by Member States regarding fishery dependent indices (such as LPUE) for their use as input for hake in GSAs 1-5-6-7 assessment.

- Review the growth parameters by sex and sex combined:
- Review the report of the ad-hoc contract which should be launched in support of this ToR for the EWG and propose the growth model(s) to be used for the stock assessment.

- Review commercial catch-at-age and survey numbers-at-age inputs, accounting for the revised growth models, if possible, accounting for differential growth by sex.

- Apply the methodologies developed by EWG 25-01 to revise the input data and the input parameters where it will be deemed necessary, such as based on calculations of a set of M vectors and test of their robustness following the methods developed in EWG 25-01.

TOR 2: Stock Assessment models:

- **2.1 Review and update the a4a model for the assessment of hake in GSA 1-5-6-7 from EWG 24-10 accounting for the former revisions of input data.** If data concerning the fishery and surveys in 2024 is available and processed for the EWG, the EWG should also update the a4a assessment including this data until 2024.

- 2.2 Discuss the pros and cons of alternative assessment approaches which might be presented by the participants to the EWG**,** to suggest potential future improvements in the advice process.