

Joint Recommendation of the North Western Waters High-Level Group

Directed Fisheries for squid

Background

Regulation (EU) 2019/1241 on the conservation of fisheries resources and the protection of marine ecosystems through technical measures (hereafter “Technical measures regulation”) lays down technical measures concerning the taking and landing of marine biological resources, the operation of fishing gear and the interaction of fishing activities with marine ecosystems.

Among many measures, it provides rules regarding the mesh sizes applicable in the various sea basins, setting a baseline mesh size as well as derogated mesh sizes for various directed fisheries. Directed fishing is defined under article 6.3 as a “fishing effort targeted at a specific species or group of species”.

This regulation also provides a regionalisation procedure, under its article 15. Member States, having a direct management interest in a sea basin and meeting in regional groups may submit joint recommendations. These joint recommendations shall aim at achieving the objectives and targets set out in the Regulation. The measures they prescribe in relation to the mesh size specifications set out in the annexes of the regulation shall not lead to a deterioration of selectivity standards.

Article 27.7 of the Technical measures regulation requires that Member States groups further define the term of directed fishing.

The regulations sets a baseline mesh size of at least 120 mm, or at least 100 mm in ICES sub-area 7b-7k for towed gears in the North Western Waters. Annex VI – part B allows derogations for specific directed fisheries, provided that by-catches of cod, haddock and saithe do not exceed 20 % of the total catch in live weight of all marine biological resources landed after each fishing trip.

This joint recommendation requests the modification of the derogation from the baseline mesh size for directed fisheries for squid, currently authorised for towed gears of a 40mm mesh size. This modification is expected to improve the selectivity in the area and to address control issues.

The Scheveningen Member States group has also had similar discussions on reviewing the minimum mesh size for vessels fishing directly for squids with towed gears.

The North Western Waters Group recalls the objective of the regionalised approach is to enable the taking into account of regional specificities. However, in the interests of transparency and information sharing, and given that some Member States are part of both regional groups, the Scheveningen group has been kept informed of the developments with regard to this joint recommendation.

North Western Waters High-Level Group

The North Western Waters group is composed of Belgium, Ireland, France, the Netherlands and Spain. The high-level group relies on a technical group as well as a Control Expert group and is chaired by France for the first term of 2024.

In coordination with the Scheveningen group, chaired by France and working on a similar derogation, the Fisheries Directors of the North Western Waters (NWW) Member States Group have agreed the present Joint Recommendation on the XXth XXX 202X.

Consultation of the North Western Waters Advisory Council

Being aware of the importance of solid input from stakeholders in the process of drawing up the proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and the Council on the conservation of fishery resources and the protection of marine ecosystems through technical measures, and in light of Article 18(2) of the Basic Regulation, the high-level group chair has consulted the North Western Waters Advisory Council (NWWAC) on the 29th of October 2021, asking for advice regarding this project.

The NWWAC positively answered on the 25th of March 2021.

The NWWAC supports this proposition, underlining the potential reduction of unwanted catches of juvenile fish species. It conveys the wide support of its members for the setting of a minimum 80mm mesh size for bottom trawls and seines targeting squid in area 7, but a lack of consensus regarding a similar measure for area 6.

The NWWAC finally conveys the concerns of specific small-scale coastal fisheries operating in area 7e about potential unwanted drawbacks such a regulatory change might bring in the absence of a fully consolidated definition for the notion of directed fishery.

The North Western Waters Member States group took good note of this contribution when drafting the present joint recommendation.

Proposed measures

Considering the concerns about this derogation from the baseline mesh size, the North Western Waters group requests to amend the general derogation from the baseline mesh size for directed fisheries for squid in Regulation (EU) 2019/1241).

Datas as well as their environmental and socio-economic impact should be monitored, and the result should be discussed within one-year delay at technical by MS to have a more comprehensive vision of the measures. If the outcome results in undesired side effects, amendment of the JR should be considered. The current text in Regulation (EU) 2019/1241 has been used as the basis for this request. The modifications presented below should adapt the table under point 1.2 in Annex VI, part B of this Regulation.

- Following this joint recommendation, **the fourth row** of the table should be amended and replaced as follows :

MESH SIZE	GEOGRAPHICAL AREAS	CONDITIONS
<u>Current redaction of the Regulation :</u>		
At least 80 mm	ICES divisions 7d and 7e	Directed fishing for whiting, mackerel and species not subject to catch limits and which are not covered elsewhere in the table, using bottom trawls.
<u>Amendment requested by the NWW group :</u>		
At least 80 mm	ICES divisions 7d and 7e	Directed fishing for whiting, mackerel and species not subject to catch limits including squids and which are not covered elsewhere in the table, using bottom trawls.

- In addition, **the fifth row** of the table should be amended and replaced as follows :

MESH SIZE	GEOGRAPHICAL AREAS	CONDITIONS
<u>Current redaction of the Regulation :</u>		
At least 40 mm	Whole area	Directed fishing for squid (<i>Lolignidae</i> , <i>Ommastrephidae</i>)
<u>Amendments requested by the NWW group :</u>		
At least 40 mm	<u>ICES subarea 5 and 6</u>	Directed fishing for squid (<i>Lolignidae</i> , <i>Ommastrephidae</i>)

- Finally, **three new rows** should be added following the amended fifth row of the table¹

MESH SIZE	GEOGRAPHICAL AREAS	CONDITIONS
At least 80mm	ICES divisions 7a, 7b, 7c, 7d, 7e, 7g, 7h, 7k	Directed fishing for squid (<i>Lolignidae</i> , <i>Ommastrephidae</i>) with bottom trawls and seines
At least 40 mm	ICES division 7e	Directed fishing for squid (<i>Lolignidae</i> , <i>Ommastrephidae</i>) with pelagic otter trawls (OTM) <u>in the 12m.n. zone</u>
At least 40 mm	ICES division 7j	Directed fishing for squid (<i>Lolignidae</i> , <i>Ommastrephidae</i>) with bottom trawls and seines

Current fishing practices :

French bottom trawlers and seiners are already mostly operating with 80mm mesh size gears when targeting squids.

The French small-scale coastal fishery benefitting from the maintaining of the 40mm derogation above is operating with OTM gears in the 12m.n zone of Bretagne region (ICES area 7e). This fleet benefits from specific regional authorisations allowing directed fishing for mackerel. It is mostly composed of vessels under 13m long.

As catch composition vary, a limited number of fishing trips can be composed of large catches of squid when that species is present in these waters.

Considering that the definition for directed fishing has not been precised yet for small pelagic species (last entry of the table in the TMR regulation), the specificities of this local fishery should be taken into account.

Ireland has squid fisheries which utilise the current derogation. These activities mainly take place along the shelf-edge to the west of Kerry and Cork and to a lesser extent along the shelf-edge to the west of the Great Sole bank (ICES areas 7j). It is therefore necessary for these squid fisheries to be taken into account.

¹ Current rows n°6 and n°7 allowing the use of a 16mm mesh size in the whole area for the directed fishery of small pelagic species not covered elsewhere in the table, for common and Aesop shrimps and for sandeel remain unchanged and are just moved further down in the table.

Scientific argumentation

This request narrows the scope of a mesh size derogation provided by Regulation (EU) 2019/1241. This joint recommendation is therefore in line with the objectives of this regulation.

Considering that the improvements in selectivity is fairly intuitive, the High level group does not submit any scientific studies or data related to this joint recommendation.