

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. The North Western Waters group was chaired by France during the first term of 2024 and is now chaired by Belgium during the second term of 2024.

In coordination with the Scheveningen group, chaired by Sweden, the Fisheries Directors of the North Western Waters (NWW) Members States Group have agreed the present Joint Recommendation on 29th October 2024.

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).

Data as well as their environmental and socio-economic impact should be monitored, and the result should be discussed within one-year delay at technical level 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, Ommastrephidae</i>) with bottom trawls and seines
At least 40 mm	ICES division 7e	Directed fishing for squid (<i>Lolignidae, Ommastrephidae</i>) with pelagic otter trawls (OTM) in the 12m.n. zone
At least 40 mm	ICES division 7j	Directed fishing for squid (<i>Lolignidae, Ommastrephidae</i>) with bottom trawls and seines

Current fishing practices :

Dutch catches in ICES area 7

Catches

The number of Dutch vessels reporting catches of European squid (*Loligo vulgaris*) in ICES Area 7 has shown an increase over the years, rising from 22 vessels in 2019 to 26 vessels in 2023. The quantity of catches has fluctuated. In 2019, Dutch vessels caught approximately 1,043 tonnes of European squid. This dropped to around 590 tonnes in both 2020 and 2021. The catches rebounded in 2022 and 2023, with Dutch vessels catching 933 tonnes and 958 tonnes, respectively. As of September 24, 2024, only 269 tonnes of squid have been caught in 2024. However, the fishing season for squid just started for this year (typically running from September until March).

ICES-areas

From 2019 to 2024, 99% of the European squid caught by Dutch vessels in ICES Area 7 was caught in Subarea 7d, with only 1% coming from Subarea 7e. In contrast, there is minimal Dutch activity in ICES Areas 5 and 6 concerning European squid. Any squid caught in these areas is bycatch from pelagic trawlers, specifically those using pelagic otter trawls (OTM) equipped with mesh sizes between 36 and 44 mm.

Gear

Within ICES Area 7, the Dutch demersal fleet was responsible for most European squid catches. Between 2019 and 2024, 98% of these catches were made using Scottish seines/flyshoot (SSC), while 1.3% were caught with Danish seines (SDN). From 2019 to 2024 the majority (88%) of demersal vessels employed a mesh size of 80 mm and up. Only 12%

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.

used mesh sizes below 80 mm. Within the selection of vessels there is no distinguishable trend in mesh sizes either upward or downward. The table below shows the ratio between the different mesh sizes in this fishery per year.

In area 7e, 19 fishing trips have taken place with OTM fishing gear in recent years (2020-present). This happened with 7 different vessels which caught a total of 1,923,532 kg of fish. The mesh sizes used varied between 32 and 44 mm. Of that, 44 kg is squid. These three catches are from the same fishing trip in 2021. In total, 141 kg of squid was caught with OTM in area 7j in the period 2020-present.

Year	European squid catch, all mesh sizes (kg)	European squid catch demersal (SSC, SDN, OTB), mesh size ≥80 mm (kg)	European squid catch demersal (SSC, SDN, OTB), ≥80 mm, part of total squid catch (%)	European squid catch demersal (SSC, SDN, OTB), mesh size <80 mm (kg)	European squid catch demersal (SSC, SDN, OTB), mesh size <80 mm, part of total squid catch (%)	European squid catch pelagic (OTM), mesh size <80 mm (kg)	European squid catch pelagic (OTM), mesh size <80 mm, part of total squid catch (%)
2019	1.043.717	1.037.582	99%	0	0%	314	0%
2020	589.670	446.623	76%	141.237	24%	442	0%
2021	586.798	480.365	82%	98.603	17%	1.466	0%
2022	933.328	846.678	91%	85.898	9%	752	0%
2023	957.894	784.841	82%	164.059	17%	8.994	1%
2024	268.891	241.016	90%	27.875	10%	0	0%
Total	4.380.298	3.837.105	88%	517.672	12%	11.968	0%

ICES-area 7, numbers in kg.

Squid as bycatch

European squid was also incidentally caught as bycatch by pelagic trawlers, particularly those using pelagic otter trawls. Similar bycatch was observed in ICES Areas 5 and 6, where pelagic otter trawls also caught European squid incidentally.

French catches in ICES area 7

The total amount of squid landings in area 7 has remained mostly stable over the past few years, with 2,568 t in 2019 and 2,656 t in 2023.

French bottom trawlers and seiners primarily operate with 80 mm mesh size gear when targeting squid. Indeed, we can observe that 95.9% of all squid landings in area 7 from 2023 were made with a minimum mesh size of 80 mm.

In 2019, 84.1% of the landings were made by vessels equipped with bottom trawls using a mesh size of at least 80 mm. This year, only 0.55% of our vessels fishing with bottom trawls in area 7 used a mesh size smaller than 80 mm. This data has remained quite stable; in 2023, 76.5% of squid was landed by vessels using bottom trawls equipped with mesh sizes greater than 80 mm. In 2023, only 0.97% of vessels fishing for squid were equipped with mesh sizes smaller than 80 mm.

Year	Total landings (t)	Demersal (OTT, OTB) ≥80mm (t)	% of total landings, demersal, ≥80mm	Demersal (OTB, OTT) <80mm (t)	% of total landings, demersal, <80mm	Pelagic (OTM) ≥ 80mm (t)	% of total landings, pelagic ≥ 80mm	Pelagic (OTM) <80mm (t)	% of total landings, pelagic <80mm
2019	2568,92	2160,70	84,1	14,02	0,55	5,85	0,22	103,89	4,04
2020	1457,23	1248,83	85,7	8,41	0,58	1,04	0,07	57,63	3,95
2021	1612,59	1203,46	74,6	18,68	1,16	1,12	0,07	137,30	8,51
2022	3012,75	2236,73	74,2	62,15	2,06	4,30	0,14	195,61	6,49
2023	2656,16	2113,66	79,6	31,39	1,18	2,14	0,08	55,73	2,09
2024	662,85	507,15	76,5	6,40	0,97	0,83	0,12	22,59	3,40

(This table represents the French landings of squid in ICES area 7 with the most commonly used gear, namely OTT, OTB and OTM.)

The French small-scale coastal fishery benefiting from the maintenance of the 40 mm derogation operates with OTM gear in the 12 nautical mile zone of the Brittany region (ICES area 7e). This fleet has specific regional authorizations allowing directed fishing for mackerel and is primarily composed of vessels under 13 m in length. As catch composition varies, a limited number of fishing trips can consist of large catches of squid when that species is present in these waters. Considering that the definition of directed fishing has not yet been clarified for small pelagic species (the last entry of the table in the TMR regulation), the specificities of this local fishery should be taken into account by introducing a derogation for the minimum reference size of 40 mm for directed fishing for squid with pelagic otter trawls (OTM) in ICES subarea 7e.

This derogation will be beneficial for the maintenance of our small-scale fishery for mackerel in the area, while at the same time having a minimal overall impact on the species, since the use of gear with a mesh size lower than 80 mm remains marginal, as described hereafter. Landings of squid in area 7e by vessels using pelagic otter trawls have remained relatively stable between 2019 and 2021, representing between 1.12% and 1.45% of squid fisheries in this area. There has been a slight increase in landings in 2022 and 2023, with 2.50% and 4.4% of squid in ICES subarea 7e caught as bycatch by vessels fishing for mackerel operating with OTM gear. In terms of mesh size, in 2019 only 1.01% of our vessels operating with OTM in area 7e were equipped with a mesh size smaller than 80 mm; in 2023, this was the case for only 4.07% of vessels.

Irish catches in ICES area 7

Ireland has targeted squid fisheries (targeted squid fishery is defined here as: more than 50% of the total landings consist of squid) which utilise the current 40mm 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 necessary for these squid fisheries to be taken into account.

In ICES area 7 all Irish squid landings have been caught by trawl gears (OTB = Bottom otter trawl, OTT = Otter twin trawls, TB = Trawl, TBN = *Nephrops* trawls) (see **Fig1**)

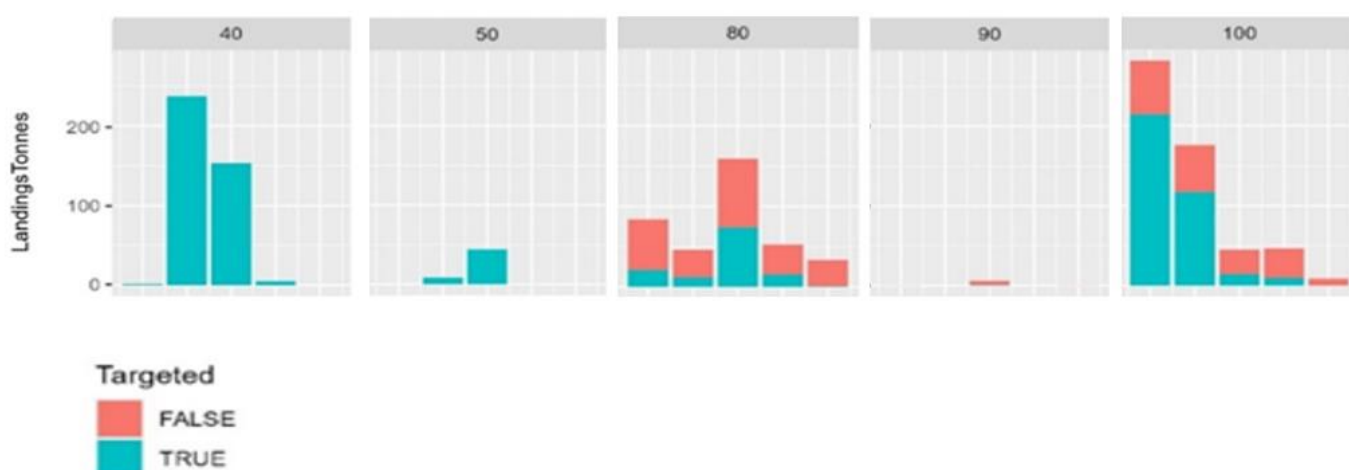
Fig1 Squid landings (tonnes) in ICES area 7j by gear, from 2019 – 2023.

ICES area	OTB	OTT	TB	TBN	Total tonnes
27.7.j	770	231	<1	4	1005

As illustrated in **Figure 2** it is clear that the 40mm derogation is being used for targeted squid fisheries

Figure 2. Squid landings (tonnes) in ICES area 7 by mesh size for targeted (>50% of catch was squid) and by-catch trips, from 2019 – 2023.

Squid landings in ICES area 7



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.

The group wants to ensure as much as possible a level playing field with the North Sea and the UK waters in this matter. The UK has increased the mesh size of the directed fisheries targeting squids (belonging to families Loliginidae and Ommastrephidae) from 40 mm to 80 mm within the English zone of the United Kingdom waters since the 24th of October 2023. Furthermore, the Commission is currently drafting a delegated act to change the current mesh size for directed fishing for squid (at least 40 mm in the whole area) to at least 80 mm in the North Sea (ICES sub- area 4). Without similar measures in the Northwestern Waters such uneven level playing field would negatively affect the EU fisheries sectors.