COMMISSION SERVICES NON PAPER
23 November 2016

This document serves as a basis for discussion at the Working Party on Internal and External Fisheries Policy. It cannot in any circumstances be regarded as the official position of the Commission. It is intended solely for those to whom it is addressed.

Updates to Commission proposal COM(2016) 698 for a Council Regulation fixing for 2017 the fishing opportunities for certain fish stocks and groups of fish stocks, applicable in Union waters and, for Union vessels, in certain non-Union waters

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1 EXPLANATORY NOTE

INTRODUCTION

Sea bass in Bay of Biscay ICES area VIIIab.

Data on landings for sea bass in the Bay of Biscay between 2011-2015 was provided by France, Spain and the United Kingdom; this data demonstrates that annual commercial landings have decreased in area VIIIa in 2015 by 14%[1]. In area VIIIb the decline is 13%[2]. Comparison of monthly catches for 2016 with the corresponding month in the previous year identifies on average a 20% reduction[3].

Examination of this landing data as well as of reports from the fishing industry support concerns raised by the industry over significant and continuous decreases in catch in 2015 and 2016. The industry considers this stock biologically linked to the stock in the Celtic Sea/Channel (ICES area VII) which has already substantially declined and ICES recommends a 0 TAC for 2017 for this stock. The most recent evidence therefore points to an accelerating decline of sea bass also in the Bay of Biscay. It is important to stress that sea bass is a slow maturing stock and therefore any remedial actions to halt the decline of this stock and to bring it back to its historic higher levels are expected to take between 4 and 7 years to produce effect. Therefore in the absence of agreed long term management measures action is needed to minimise and avoid further economic loss to the fishing industry and a potential depletion of the stock.

Scientific advice

ICES gives advice for two stocks in the Bay of Biscay; Area VIIIab and Area VIIIc and IX. Stock structures however remain poorly defined and work is ongoing to refine the stock identities and improve the quality of the assessments. Advice for both areas were last issued in 2015 for the two years 2016 and 2017. Both are considered data limited stocks (ICES Cat 3 and 5 respectively). ICES advice for Area VIIIab previously identified an increasing biomass and points to a recent increase of commercial catches. In 2015 ICES recommended a commercial catch of 2634t for 2016 and 2017. The catch in 2015 was however only 2253t, which is an indication that the stock is going down faster than originally estimated. There is no indication of a decrease in effort. This is furthermore visible from graphs 1 and 2 in the annex.

There is little current information on recreational catch. Recreational catches are considered significant, but cannot be quantified by ICES. Existing estimations of 1900t are considered imprecise[4], but at least 25% of the catch may be recreational.

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[1] Annex: Graph 1 and 2

[2] Annex: Table 1 monthly landings of sea bass – FIDES database

[3] Annex : Graphs 3 and 4.

[4] ICES stock annex for European sea bass in VIIIa,b,d 2013;
French recreational survey, estimate 1900t with 95% confidence interval between 932t and 2870t

Current fisheries

Sea bass in ICES area VIIIab is predominately caught by small fleets as 53% of the catch is taken by vessels less than 12m in length using two main gear types, namely hook and lines and trammel gillnets[5]. Furthermore 23% of the vessels are active in both areas and vessels are not restricted to a specific gear type.

Average monthly catch 2011-2015		
Gear	Catch per month (t)	Vessel numbers (2015)
All GN, all drift net and fixed (trammel) net fisheries	0.179	388
All LL, all long lines or pole and line fisheries	0.276	250
All types of demersal trawls including Danish / Scottish seines	0.172	337
Purse seine (PS)	0.076	28
Pelagic: OTM or PTM, Mid water or pelagic trawls	0.718	27
Others	0.007	122
Total average yearly catch (t)	**2698**	**1152**

The Common Fisheries Policy requires a precautionary approach to fisheries management and aims to ensure that the exploitation of living resources restores and maintains biological resources above levels which can produce the maximum sustainable yield. The Commission therefore proposes to introduce Vessel Catch Limits (VCL) for all commercial fishermen in order to reduce the overall catch and to limit the targeting of sporadic aggregations. The large number of vessels involved (approx. 1152) mean that even if individual vessels have low levels of catches, this will still result in significant overall catches from the commercial fleets. The current proposal is estimated to result in a catch of 2205t, a 2% reduction on current catches.[6]

Some hook and line fisheries already operate a voluntary 2 month closure in February and March and achieve a higher economic return on the resource. To allow for the operation of this voluntary closure without decreasing their annual fishing opportunities an annual allocation is proposed for hook and line fishermen.

In the absence of any effective and binding management measures for recreational fisheries, the Commission assumes that recreational fishing effort will continue at the current level representing an important contribution to the overall outtake. The Commission therefore proposes to introduce monthly limits for recreational catches.

[5] Annex: Graph 5,

[6] Annex table 2

2. AMENDMENTS TO RECITALS

2.1 New recital XX is introduced.

1. There is a progressive decrease in the commercial catches of sea bass in the Bay of Biscay. To restore and maintain this slowly maturing stock and to prevent further decreases in fishing opportunities for commercial and recreational fishermen, preventative conservation measures should be introduced. For the commercial sector, vessel catch limits should be put in place in order to reduce targeted fishing. Recreational catches represent an important contribution to mortality, and necessary measures should be put established to restrict the monthly out-take. This approach is consistent with the measures applicable in ICES subarea VII.

3. AMENDMENTS TO ARTICLES

A new article 10a is inserted after Article 10:

2. "Article 10a
Measures on Sea bass fisheries in the Bay of Biscay

1. It shall be prohibited for Union fishing vessels to fish for sea bass and to retain on board, relocate, tranship or land quantities of sea bass caught in ICES area VIIIa and VIIIb exceeding the following limits set out in Paragraph 2 .

2. For the purposes of paragraph 1, the following catch limits shall apply:

Gear	Allocation	
	Annual (t)	Monthly (t)
All GN, all drift net and fixed (trammel) net fisheries		0.170
All LL, all long lines or pole and line fisheries	3.5	
all types of demersal trawls including Danish / Scottish seines		0.080
Purse seine (PS)		0.060
Pelagic: OTM or PTM, Mid water or pelagic trawls		0.60

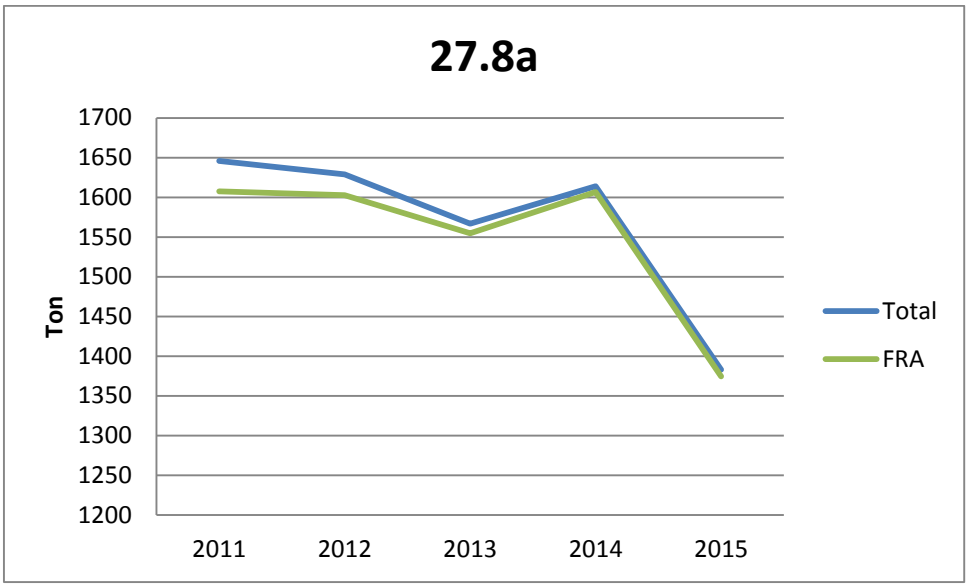
3. For Union vessels using more than one gear in a single calendar month the lowest catch limit set in paragraph 2 for either gear shall apply.

4. The catch limits set in paragraph 2 shall not be transferable from one month to another and between vessels.

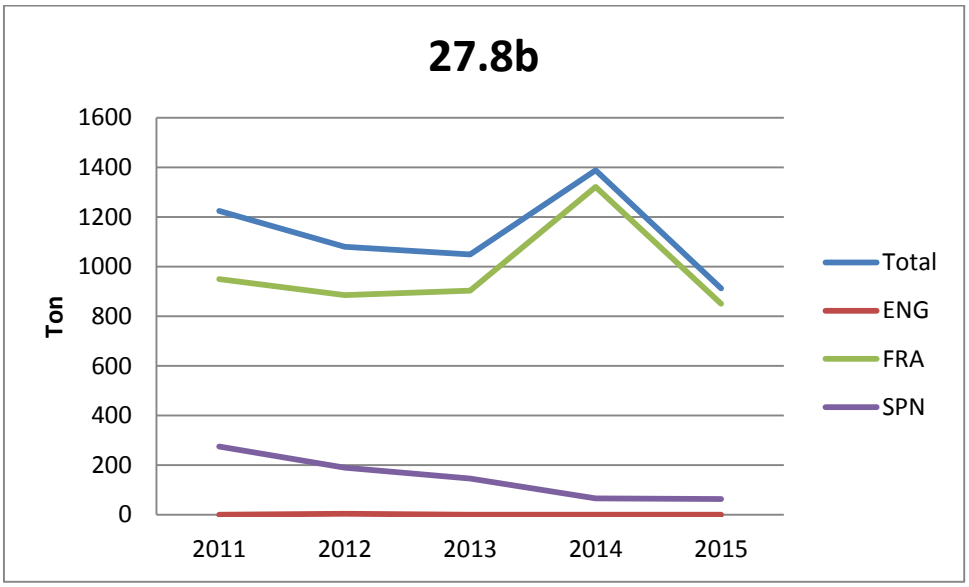
5. Member States shall report to the Commission catches of sea bass per vessel indicating the gear type used not later than 14 days after the end of each month.

6. From 1 January 2017 to 31 December 2017 in recreational fisheries in ICES divisions VIIIab, a maximum of 10 fish per fisherman may be retained each month.

Annex Tables and Graphs

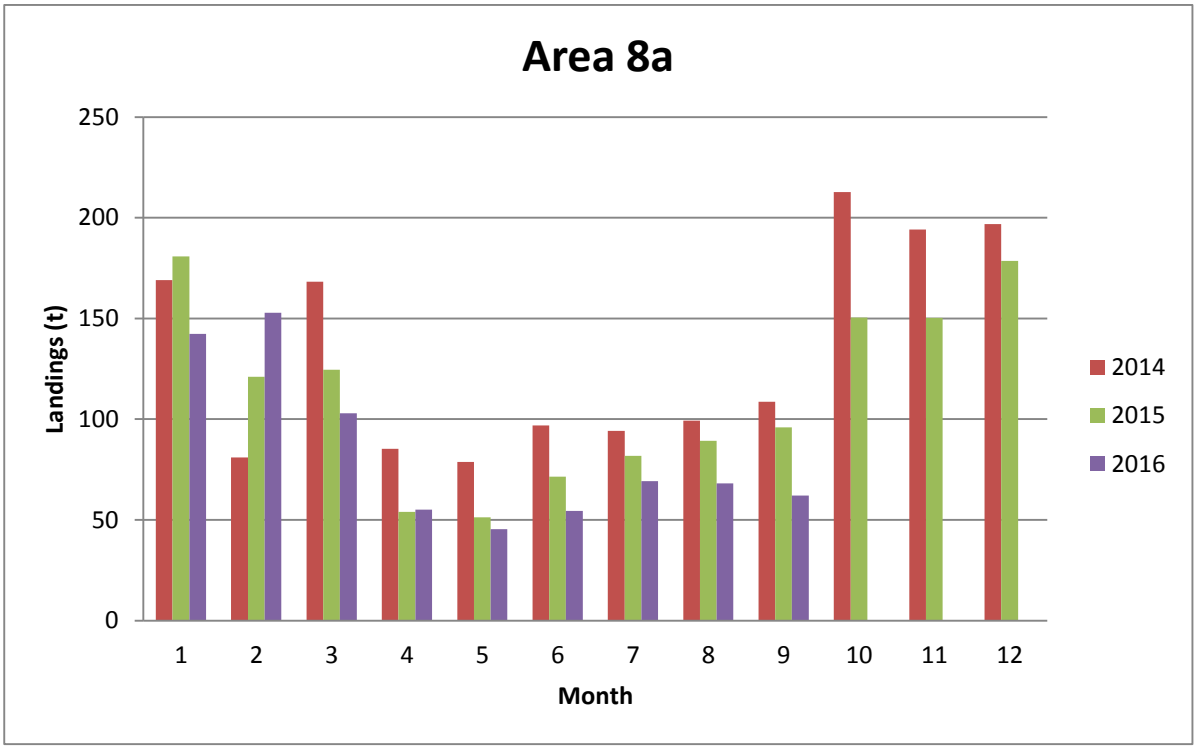


Graph 1 Area 8a: Total catch (French catches only shown)

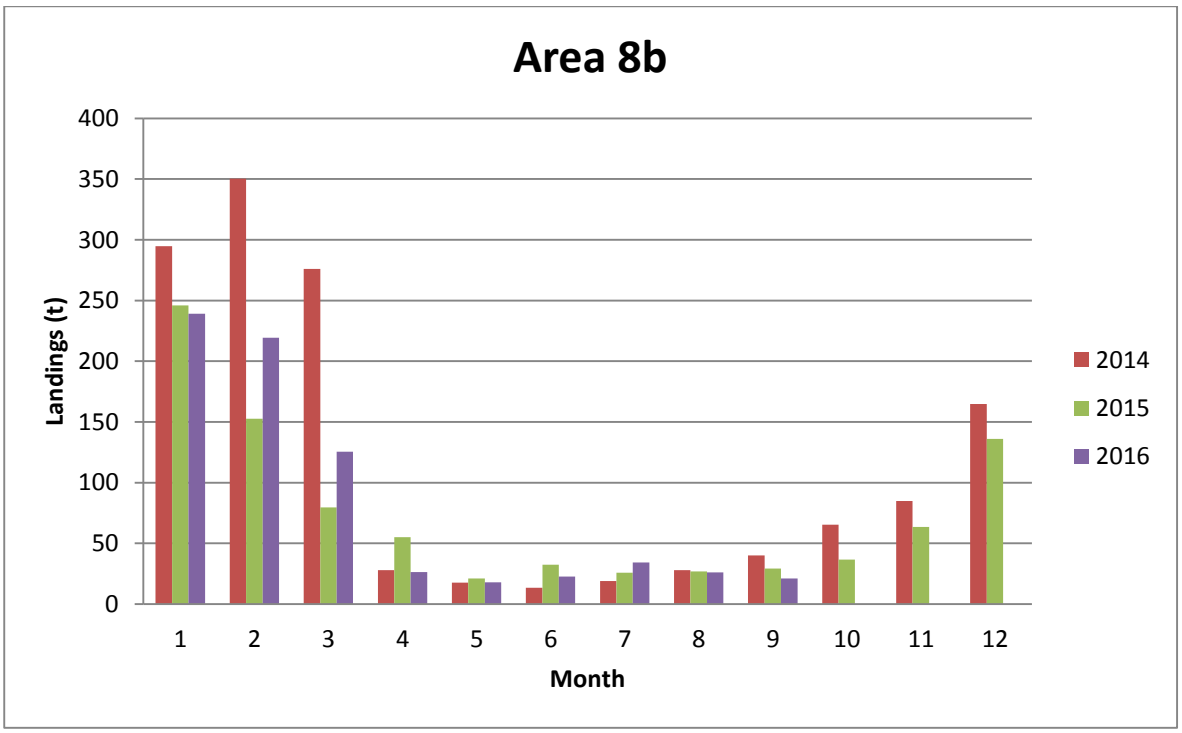


Graph 2 Area 8b: total catch by all MS

Area VIIIa: average catch (1568t) primarily from French vessels (98.8%). Catches stable 2011-2014, then a 14% reduction in 2015.
Area VIIIb; average catch (1130t) primarily from FR vessels (86%), catches more varied. See graph.
Area VIIIc: average catch (138t) primarily from Spanish Vessels (88%),
Area VIIId, average catch per year approx. 10t



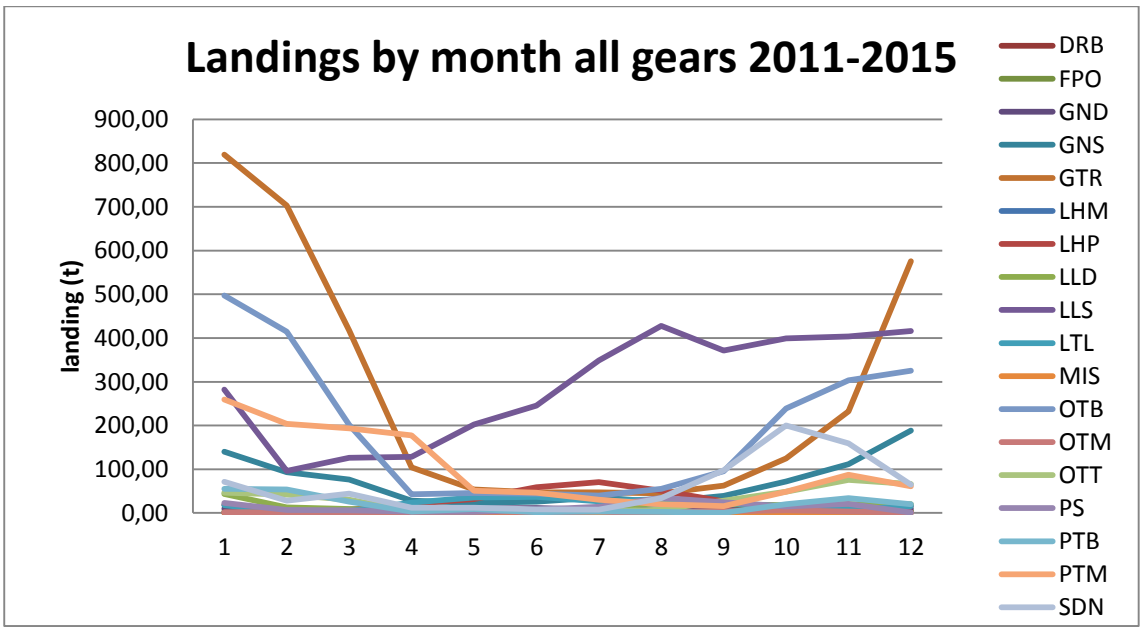
Graph 3 Area 8a: Total catch by month (all MS)



Graph 4 Area 8b: Total catch by month (all MS)

Landings of BSS 2014-2016 (tonnes)		Year		
FAO Area	Period	2014	2015	2016
27.8.a	1	169.1	180.8	142.3
	2	81.0	121.1	152.9
	3	168.3	124.6	102.9
	4	85.3	54.0	55.1
	5	78.7	51.2	45.4
	6	96.9	71.5	54.5
	7	94.2	81.8	69.2
	8	99.3	89.2	68.2
	9	108.6	95.9	62.1
	10	212.7	150.5	
	11	194.1	150.3	
	12	196.8	178.6	
27.8.a Total		**1585.3**	**1349.4**	**752.6**
27.8.b	1	294.7	246.0	239.1
	2	350.4	152.5	219.4
	3	276.0	79.5	125.5
	4	28.0	54.9	26.5
	5	17.7	21.1	18.0
	6	13.3	32.3	22.5
	7	18.9	25.9	34.3
	8	27.9	27.0	26.0
	9	40.2	29.3	21.1
	10	65.3	36.5	
	11	85.0	63.5	
	12	164.8	135.9	
27.8.b Total		**1382.2**	**904.4**	**732.3**
Grand Total		**2967.5**	**2253.8**	**1484.9**

Table 1: monthly catches of sea bass in Area VIIIa and b extracted from FIDES database.



Graph 5 Landings per month by recorded gear type (5 year average for all MS)

Gear	Allocation	
	Annual (t)	Monthly (t)
All GN, all drift net and fixed (trammel) net fisheries		0.170
All LL, all long lines or pole and line fisheries	3.5	
all types of demersal trawls including Danish / Scottish seines		0.080
Purse seine (PS)		0.060
Pelagic: OTM or PTM, Mid water or pelagic trawls		0.60
Total Catch estimate for 2017		2205

Table 2: Commercial catch estimate for 2017 on proposed measures