



PEW RESPONSE TO DEEP-SEA FISHING LIMITS 2017–2018

28 NOVEMBER 2016

Summary

On 14 November 2016 the Fisheries Council agreed on fishing limits for deep-sea stocks in 2017 and 2018. While the agreement reduces Total Allowable Catches (TACs) for most deep-sea stocks, the majority of fishing limits (15 out of 20) set by EU fisheries ministers exceed levels advised by the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES). This is very disappointing given the status of those stocks and their vulnerability to over-exploitation.

While Pew appreciates that the Council accepted the European Commission's proposal to designate orange roughy as a prohibited species, we are concerned that removing the three associated TACs from the regulation alone will not protect orange roughy from overfishing, as bycatch and discarding of dead fish will continue, with no incentive for deep-sea fishers to improve the selectivity of their fishing practices to reduce fishing mortality of the stock.

Pew is especially concerned about the Council decision to abandon the zero TACs that were in place for deep-sea sharks for several years and to instead adopt three separate TACs of ten tonnes for each year (2017 and 2018). This decision ignores the vulnerability of deep-sea sharks to overfishing, the scientific advice to have no targeted fisheries for many deep-sea shark species, and that a number of the deep-sea shark species in the northeast Atlantic covered by the TAC are classified as "endangered" or "critically endangered" by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).¹

Council decision on fishing limits for deep-sea stocks in 2017 and 2018

On 14 November 2016 the Fisheries Council agreed on fishing limits for deep-sea stocks in 2017 and 2018. A preliminary document outlining these decisions was published on the Council website.²

1. Progress to end overfishing of deep-sea stocks

Pew welcomes the TACs set by the Council not exceeding the ICES scientific advice: Alfonsinos (areas 3-10, 12 & 14); Black scabbardfish in areas 1-4; and Deep-sea sharks in ICES area 12 (*Deania hystricosa* and *Deania profundorum*).

¹ Nieto, A et al., European Red List of marine fishes. Prepared by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. 2015.

² http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/agrifish/2016/11/TABLE-EU-TOTAL-ALLOWABLE-CATCHES_pdf/

The Council also did not exceed the scientific advice for roundnose grenadier in areas 5b, 6 & 7. However, ministers missed the opportunity set a more conservative TAC, or zero TAC, which would have been highly appropriate given roundnose grenadier's "endangered" status on the IUCN redlist. In addition, Council set combined TACs for roundnose and roughhead grenadier. This will not prevent catches and overexploitation of the roughhead grenadier stock, where ICES has advised no directed fisheries from 2016 to 2020.

2. Deep-sea TACs set exceeding the scientific advice

Pew is concerned that for black scabbardfish in areas 5-7 & 12 and for roundnose grenadier in areas 8-10 & 12 the Council set a TAC exceeding the ICES advice for catches in 2017.

In addition, the Council set a TAC for 2018 in the absence of scientific advice for roundnose grenadier in areas 1, 2, 4 and in areas 8-10 & 12. For black scabbardfish in the Fishery Committee for the Eastern Central Atlantic (CECAF) area 34.1.2 it was not clear if scientific advice on catches was followed. The Commission in its proposal had highlighted it was awaiting further scientific advice to underpin the setting of the TAC but it is not clear whether that advice was forthcoming or followed by the Council.

Pew regrets that for twelve TACs it appears that the Council exceeded the ICES scientific advice for 2017 and 2018. These are:

- Deep-sea sharks (areas 5-9; CECAF areas 34.1.1, 34.1.2 & 34.2; and area 10);
- Black scabbardfish (areas 8-10);
- Roundnose grenadier (area 3);
- Red seabream (areas 6-8; area 9; and area 10); and
- Greater forkbeard (areas 1-4; areas 5-7; areas 8 & 9; and areas 10 & 12).

It also appears that ministers declined to follow the European Commission's proposal to extend the red seabream TAC in Area 9 to CECAF 34.1.11 in order to better account for fishing mortality caused by catches in adjacent management areas.

Removal of zero TACs for orange roughy and deep-sea sharks

Pew appreciates that the Council accepted the European Commission's proposal to designate orange roughy as a "prohibited species". However, this designation and the removal of three associated fishing limits from the regulation will not protect orange roughy from overfishing, as bycatch and discarding of dead fish will continue, with no incentive for deep-sea fishers to improve the selectivity of their fishing practices to reduce fishing mortality of the stock.

With regard to deep-sea sharks, Pew is deeply concerned that the Council chose to abandon the zero TACs that were in place for several years, and instead adopted three TACs of ten tonnes for each year (2017 and 2018). The relevant TACs for deep-sea sharks were previously set for two management areas:

- i) areas 5-9, CECAF areas 34.1.1, 34.1.2 & 34.2 and
- ii) area 10.

It is unclear why EU ministers separated the TACs for areas 5-9 and CECAF areas 34.1.1, 34.1.2 & 34.2. This does not seem to align the management areas with scientific advice. Yet, Council has effectively increased the TACs for these vulnerable species in these areas from zero to twenty tonnes.

Ministers justified setting non-zero TACs for deep-sea sharks on the basis that they are unavoidably by-caught in longline fisheries targeting black scabbardfish and that landing deep-sea shark bycatches will improve the management framework for the black scabbardfish fishery and obtain improved data on deep-sea sharks.

However, scientists strongly advised against setting a TAC for certain deep-sea shark species in advance of the November Council meeting. In its advice for 2017 ICES stated that “fishing mortality should be minimized; therefore, any possible provision for bycatch to be landed should be part of a management plan which includes close monitoring of the stock”³. When asked to review the option of setting a bycatch TAC for deep-sea sharks, the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) advised against this as 1) there have been no selectivity trials, gear adaptations or spatial avoidance aimed at reducing deep-sea shark bycatch in the fishery and, 2) there is a commercial interest in these species, so setting a TAC would not dissuade operators from catching these sharks⁴.

Pew recognises that limited data is a barrier to improved scientific assessments of the status of deep-sea sharks and a full scientific assessment is needed so the stock status can be ascertained and their spatial distribution in the region analysed. However, improved data would be achieved by putting in place scientific data collection and monitoring provisions for the bycatch of deep-sea sharks in relevant fisheries, rather than through setting a TAC without any specific provisions for data collection, monitoring, control and enforcement.

Pew is especially concerned by the Council’s decision to ignore the scientific advice by both ICES and STECF and to allow fishing for highly vulnerable deep-sea shark species, particularly as several of them are listed as endangered by IUCN.

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³ ICES advice for [Leafscale gulper shark](#) and [Portuguese dogfish](#) in the Northeast Atlantic

⁴ [STECF 2016 - 52nd PLENARY MEETING REPORT \(PLEN-16-02\)](#)