

# 1 BAY OF BISCAY AND IBERIAN SEAS

## 1.3.3 Special requests

### 1.3.3.1 Update of advice for Bay of Biscay anchovy

ICES is aware that the information most recently available on Bay of Biscay anchovy (in May 2005) justifies updating the advice given in October 2004 for 2005. ICES therefore offers the following information and advice:

In autumn 2004 ICES assessed the state of the stock as follows:

*“Based on the most recent estimates of SSB and fishing mortality, ICES classifies the stock as being at risk of reduced reproductive capacity and as being harvested sustainably. The stock is very low in relation to the levels observed throughout the 1990s and this is mostly due to poor 2001 and 2002 year classes. There are some indications that the 2003 year class is below average, but somewhat better than the 2001 and 2002 year classes.”*

Based on this assessment and in relation to precautionary limits ICES recommended:

*“A preliminary TAC for 2005 should be set to 5 000 t. A catch of this size will, even in the case of poor recruitment, allow the SSB to rebuild in 2005. The TAC could be re-evaluated in the middle of the year 2005, based on the development of the fishery and on the results from the acoustic and egg surveys in May-June 2005.”*

The EU set the 2005 TAC for Bay of Biscay anchovy at 30 000 tonnes, with no provision for in-year adjustment.

ICES also advised that:

*“Measures to protect juveniles, allowing a larger part of the recruiting year class to spawn, should be considered as supplements to quota regulations. Such measures could include closures of key nursery areas and economic incentives to reduce the catch of small fish. In 1999 ICES advised on the closure of such an area (ICES Cooperative Research Report No.236, 1999) with the following boundaries:*

- *from the French coast north along longitude 1°35'W to latitude 44°45'N*
- *west to longitude 1°45'W*
- *north to latitude 46°00'N*
- *and east to the French mainland.”*

This measure was not adopted

### **Current information on the status of the Bay of Biscay anchovy**

Below please find a short resume of the additional information on the status of the Bay of Biscay anchovy stock at the end of May 2005:

- A new acoustic survey series in September/October south of 46°N was started in 2003 (JUVENA surveys). This survey was targeted on juvenile anchovy. The 2004 survey showed a reduction in juvenile anchovy abundance of 80% in comparison to 2003.
- The Spanish Spring fishery in 2005 has experienced an almost complete failure. In previous years the normal pattern has been for around 40% of the total annual Spanish catches to be taken by mid-May. In 2005 only around 200 t had been caught by this time, representing about 1% of a normal years catch. This commercial fishery has now stopped and claims for financial aid submitted. During this time, the French commercial fleet has also only been able to take small catches of around 400 tonnes.
- In early May 2005 Spain carried out a systematic survey, using seven commercial purse seine vessels. This covered a wider area of the Bay of Biscay than the commercial fishery. This survey was not able to locate any further concentrations of anchovy.
- An anchovy egg survey was carried out by Spain from 8 to 28 of May 2005, covering the area from 47°N on the French coast to 4°30'W on the Spanish coast. The survey is designed as a daily egg production method survey, and this analysis has not yet been completed. It is, however, possible to use the total egg abundance to directly estimate the spawning stock biomass. This gave an estimate of 10 400 t (half  $B_{lim}$ ) with a CV of about

62%, which means that the 95% confidence limits around this stock estimate are approximately 3000 tonnes to 30 000 tonnes.

- The area occupied by the spawning stock was also reduced, and importantly, far fewer eggs were found in the Gironde area than have been seen in any previous year apart from 2004. Adult sampling suggested that the age 1 adults were less common in the catches than age 2 (43% and 55% respectively). Normally age 1 fish would be expected to be much more abundant than age 2.
- The first indication of the strength of the new year class is from the catches of anchovy for live bait for tuna fishing in summer and autumn of 2004. Reports from fishermen indicated almost no small young-of-the-year anchovies. It should be noted, however, that this bait fishery alone has not proved to be a particularly reliable indicator of year-class strength.
- Together these data suggest a major recruitment failure in 2004.
- France has just completed a further survey, which included acoustics, surface layer egg sampling, and trawling. The preliminary indications are of low numbers of anchovy in areas where they are normally abundant. The survey also indicated very low numbers of age 1 anchovies. Anchovy eggs and adults have been seen in the area south of 45°N and at depths of 100–120 m. In the area SW of the Gironde, the survey has identified anchovy egg concentrations, but no significant acoustic recordings, except very close to the coast. No other concentrations of anchovy were identified.

Taken together, this evidence demonstrates that the stock at present is low; the recruitment to the stock in 2004 was extremely low and below the basis for the advice for 2005 presented in the autumn of 2004. Recruitment was also probably below average in 2001–2003. In 2004 the stock was already identified as being at “Increased risk of reduced reproductive capacity”. All the above evidence clearly suggests that in 2006 the stock will be very low unless the 2005 year class is very strong.

**Although based on preliminary information, ICES considers that strong management measures are urgently required, in order to protect the remaining stock, i.e. that the fishery be closed immediately, and remains closed until there is reliable fishery-independent evidence of a strong year class recruiting to the stock.**