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Subject: Management strategy for Iceland cod and a request for ICES evaluation

Since the mid 1990's the Government of Iceland has attempted through its management scheme for the Icelandic cod fishery to increase the size of the cod stock towards the size that generates maximum sustainable yield. To that end, progress has been made, reflected in lower fishing mortality and increase in spawning stock biomass from historical low of 120 thousand tons in 1993 to 220 thousand tons at present.

In accordance with this general aim, the Government has adopted a management plan for the Icelandic cod stock for the next five fishing years, starting by the 2009/2010 fishing season. The main objective of the management plan is to ensure that the spawning stock biomass (SSB) will with high probability (>95%) be above the present size of 220 thousand tons by the year 2015. According to a medium-term simulation conducted by the ICES North West Working Group this spring (Draft NWWG Report 2009), this will be achieved by applying the following harvest control rule (HCR) to calculate the total allowable catch (TAC):

$TAC_{y+1} = (0.2 B_{4+,y} + TAC_y) / 2$, where y refers to the assessment year and B4 to biomass of 4 year and older cod.

This HCR formulation is based on recommendation from national committee of experts that re-evaluated the performance of the initial catch rule adopted in 1995. The Marine Research Institute, Reykjavík has used this HCR as a basis for advice the last two years.

The Government of Iceland will determine the TAC for the next five fishing years according to this harvest control (HCR) and informs hereby the General Secretary of this harvest strategy.

The Government of Iceland requests the Council to evaluate this management plan at its earliest convenience.

Jón Bjarnason,
Minister of Fisheries and Agriculture in Iceland