



An Bille um Fhiadhúlra (Leasú), 2025
Wildlife (Amendment) Bill 2025

Meabhrán Miniúcháin
Explanatory Memorandum



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WILDLIFE (AMENDMENT) BILL 2025

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

Introduction

The sprat (*Sprattus sprattus*) is a small pelagic fish species that plays a critical ecological role in Irish marine ecosystems. It serves as a foundational food source for a wide range of marine predators, including seabirds, larger fish, and marine mammals. Despite its ecological importance, sprat is currently subject to unregulated and intensive commercial fishing in Irish waters, with no species-specific management plan or quota system in place.

This Bill seeks to amend the Wildlife Act, 1976 to provide legal protection for the sprat by including it in the Fifth Schedule of the Act. This would prohibit the targeted fishing of sprat and would place a moratorium on commercial sprat fishing until sufficient scientific data is available regarding its population dynamics, habitat use, and ecological function.

The absence of robust data on sprat stocks and their role in the marine food web has raised serious concerns among marine scientists, conservationists, and stakeholders in the sustainable fisheries sector. The precautionary principle, as outlined in international environmental law and EU biodiversity policy, supports the need for immediate protective measures in the absence of adequate scientific certainty.

This Bill introduces a new subheading under the Fifth Schedule of the Wildlife Act, 1976 to categorise sprat as a protected fish species. It also amends Section 23 of the Act to clarify that incidental bycatch of protected fish species is not prohibited, and provides a mechanism for the Minister, in consultation with the Minister for the Marine, to revoke protected status in the future, contingent on the development of a species-specific management plan and the allocation of a sustainable quota.

In recognition of the potential economic impact on inshore fishers currently reliant on sprat fisheries, the Bill also mandates the development of a Just Transition plan. This plan must be developed in consultation with relevant stakeholders and should provide support for fishers affected by the moratorium, including retraining, diversification, and financial assistance.

The Wildlife (Amendment) Bill 2025 is a necessary and timely intervention to safeguard marine biodiversity, uphold Ireland's commitments under national and international conservation frameworks, and ensure that marine resource management is grounded in science, sustainability, and fairness.

Provisions of the Bill

Section 1 includes definitions for terms used throughout the Bill.

Section 2 states that fishing be included within the scope of the term “hunt” under the provisions of the Wildlife Act, 1976.

Section 3, subsection 12 states that any protected Fish, listed in the Fifth Schedule of this Act, captured accidentally be exempt from this section.

Section 3, subsection 13 states that the Minister for the Marine may revoke protected status from Fish listed in the Fifth Schedule provided a fisheries management quota and species-specific management plan are in place.

Section 3, subsection 14 states that the Minister must develop a Just Transition plan to support fishers who are negatively impacted by the passing of this amending bill.

Section 4 states that sprat, *Sprattus sprattus*, be added to the list of protected animals under Section 23 of the Wildlife Act.

Section 5 includes in standard form the title and commencement of the Bill.

Jennifer Whitmore, TD,

Íúil, 2025.

