

**Joint Committee on Agriculture, Food and the Marine**  
**Opening Statement**  
**Irish Islands Marine Resource Organisation (IIMRO)**

The Irish Islands Marine Resource Organisation (IIMRO) would like to thank the Chair and committee for the invitation to appear and discuss the vitally important Island Fisheries (Heritage Licence) Bill.

IIMRO are a members based organisation with fishers from the islands of Donegal, Mayo, Galway and Cork. Run by and for fishers, it is a member of The Irish Islands Federation and affiliated to the Low Impact Fishers of Europe (LIFE), which represents around 10,000 small-scale fishers across Europe. Islanders have worked at national and EU level since 2006 to regain traditional seasonal fishing opportunities around our islands.

IIMRO would like to direct the committee to our recent submission on the Island Fisheries (Heritage Licence) Bill for more detailed background and reasoning behind the bill, and we would also like to emphasise aspects of the bill here today.

The bill is a direct response by lawmakers to a recommendation from the cross-party Report on Promoting Sustainable Rural Coastal and Island Communities published in 2014. IIMRO would like to publicly acknowledge and commend the work of the previous Joint Committee and this committee in working to make the bill a reality.

The purpose of the bill is to reallocate a small portion of publicly owned quota to boats on the island polyvalent register to allow island communities co-manage their fisheries and resume a low-impact seasonal fishery from small boats. By allocating public quota in this way, different fish species can be caught at different times of the year as they move closer to the islands and as weather allows. Boats are under twelve meters and use low impact, non-towed gear keeping to the principle of “the right gear in the right place at the right time”.

IIMRO are working with a number of partners such as the Trinity College Centre for Environmental Humanities, to co-design and test new approaches that address the needs of fisheries-dependent island communities and meet national and European marine objectives. It is expected that this work will complement the upcoming legislation around the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive and the national Marine Spatial Plan.

The Island Fisheries (Heritage Licences) Bill represents a chance to change a fisheries policy system that has allowed the nations' publicly owned fishery resource to be concentrated in the hands of a few, at the expense of island and other communities, whose populations continue to decline.

The Irish European Maritime and Fisheries Fund Operational Programme Summary<sup>1</sup> states:

*"The Irish fishing fleet is characterised by ... a high share of small-scale vessels: **64 %** of the total number of vessels are less than **12 meters**, but account for only **2 %** of the total value landed in 2013."*

Currently small-scale vessels on the islands are impeded from accessing the publicly owned quota resource by fleet segmentation and layers of rules that includes the requirement to have "track record" in a specific fishery before they can access quota for that species.

If a fishing boat did not have catch recorded in certain index years for a quota species then it does not receive quota thereafter, this despite the fact that boats under 10 meters are not required to log their catches. Typically these are the most valuable species and would give island fishers a more diverse and sustainable income source instead of the non-quota crab and lobster that makes up the bulk of catches at present.

A list of quota species relevant to the islands makes up part of IIMRO's submission, the committee will note that it does not include salmon, which is not a CFP quota species.

IIMRO have worked hard with public representatives across Europe and here at home over a long period to ensure that the provisions of the bill comply with the letter and spirit of the Common Fisheries Policy and other relevant legislation.

Director General Machado of DG MARE confirmed at a meeting with IIMRO members in 2015 that:

*"It was agreed that quota assignment is a matter of the national authority and that any allocation for islands within the national quota is not contrary to the Common Fisheries Policy."*

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<sup>1</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/sites/fisheries/files/docs/body/op-ireland-fact-sheet\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/sites/fisheries/files/docs/body/op-ireland-fact-sheet_en.pdf)

The Common Fisheries Policy regulation recognises that islands need to be ***“especially recognised and supported in order to enable them to survive and prosper.”*** Our neighbours in Scotland have recently passed a historic Islands (Scotland) Bill at the end of May this year and islanders here are encouraged by the cross party support which our own Island Fisheries (Heritage Licence) Bill is receiving. IIMRO are committed to continue working with the Government, other political parties and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine to make sure that the Island Fisheries (Heritage Licenses) Bill is the best possible legislation for our island communities. We ask that the committee members keep the momentum going so that the bill can become law. Thank you for your time.