

Comhdháil Oileáin na hÉireann - The Irish Islands Federation

Opening Statement: Islands (Heritage Licence) Fisheries Bill.

We thank the committee for the opportunity to comment on this very important Islands (Heritage Licence) Fisheries Bill.

In 1984 sixteen islands formed Comhdháil Oileáin na hÉireann - The Irish Islands Federation. As the representative organisation for the off shore Islands our aim is to draw attention to the difficulties facing islanders in all areas of Island life which were not, and are not being dealt with effectively either at regional or national level. Our aim is to work to find solutions which are Island proofed. As an example of protecting the Island way of life, Comhdháil along with its sister organisation Comhar na nOileán, have worked with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine to help Island farmers engage constructively with Island issues. This work recently led to improved payments under the 'Areas of Natural Constraints' which now has an 'Islands Category' as well as working with Island farmers on results based, locally-led schemes for European Innovation Partnerships. This is an example of 'Island Proofed' policies that have helped secure our Island way of life.

As part of that ongoing work we are here today to promote the Islands Fisheries (Heritage Licence) Bill.

Comhdháil, along with Comhar na nOileán, has consistently asked Government to have fishing designated as a pillar of job creation on the Islands, and appeared before this committee in 2013.

Island communities welcomed the 2014 Joint Oireachtas Committee report on Sustaining Coastal and Island Communities. We see the Island Fisheries Heritage License Bill as a logical follow on to the recommendations of the committee, especially recommendation 10; Heritage Licences. This is a simple and effective mechanism to ensure that fishing opportunities are accessible to small fishing boat owners on Islands.

Islanders are by nature resourceful and, if allowed to, can make the best use of available opportunities. Small scale fishing, which is of greatest benefit to the Island communities, is most at risk from policies that promote large scale industrial fishing. Those who remained fishing in their island communities have been forced to make a living mainly off non quota species. This is not sustainable for our communities or the fish stocks.

The current Common Fisheries Policy recognises the special requirements of small offshore islands and they are specifically referred to in the Common Fisheries Policy (paragraph 20) that controls European fisheries.

Comhdháil is one of the founding members of the European Small Islands Network (ESIN) and we work closely with islands across Europe. Through our work with ESIN we keep informed of the special position of Islands all over Europe, and of the varied solutions applied to address unique problems. We have the full support of ESIN in the ongoing work to get this bill passed into law.

To survive, fishing on the Island's needs to revert back to a system of seasonal fishing and local management, where managed quantities are taken from the various quota stocks at different times of the year.

Having our small scale Island fleet return to seasonal fishing practices will add significantly to the tourism industry; which has become an increasingly important part of the economies of the islands.

The solution advocated in the Island Fisheries (Heritage Licence) Bill will allow fishing opportunities in the form of quotas to be allocated by the Minister in order to maximise the benefit of the resource to the maximum number of people. Allocating the necessary amount to the Island fishing community will help to redress the decline.

Islands work in a different way to the mainland. The current system is simply not working for the Islands. We need to act before it is too late.

Comhdháil Oileáin na hÉireann strongly supports the introduction of the bill.
Thank you.