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Opening Statement,  
BirdWatch Ireland,  
06-11-18

# The implementation of the Common Fisheries Policy and the sustainability of Ireland's Fisheries

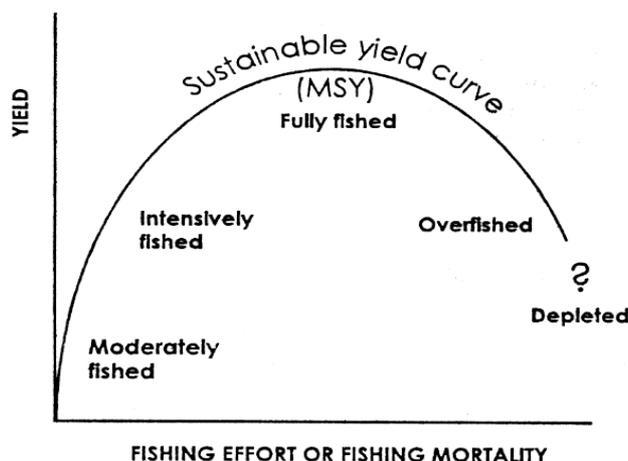
**BirdWatch Ireland presentation to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Agriculture, Food and the Marine – 6<sup>th</sup> November 2018**

## Introduction

The EU's reformed Common Fisheries Policy<sup>1</sup> or CFP entered into force in January 2014. The political agreement between the EU Council of Ministers and the European Parliament reflected the will of EU's citizens that European fisheries policy needed radical reform. This new dawn in EU fisheries policy was underpinned by overwhelming evidence and wide consensus that overfishing must end and that the failure to do so would have grave consequences for the fishing industry, the marine environment, and the food supply chain. The announcement marked the culmination of a process, which began in 2009 with extensive public consultations.

## Ending Overfishing

In practical terms what ending overfishing really means is that when decision makers like the Commission and Fisheries Ministers agree the fishing limits for a given fish stock then the upper limit of fishing is set at a sustainable level advised by the best available scientific advice. Typically, advice on fishing limits is supplied by the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea or ICES<sup>2</sup>, a global organization of 5,000 scientists from over 690 marine institutes in 20-member countries that develop science and advice to support the sustainable use of the oceans. In an Irish context ICES work in tandem with staff from the Marine Institute to provide scientific advice on the management of fish stocks.



**Figure 1: MSY Sustainable Yield Curve**

<sup>1</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:354:0022:0061:EN:PDF>

<sup>2</sup> ICES Website <http://www.ices.dk/Pages/default.aspx>



Directors: G Lyons, Chairperson, J Dowdall, C Casey, B Martin, J Fitzharris, J Lynch, T Culley, S Wilson

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Within the CFP the upper point at which fishing limits must be set is called the Maximum Sustainable Yield or MSY. Maximum Sustainable Yield is the maximum yield or catch that can be taken from a fish stock over time without depleting the size of the fish population. At this point the population can replace the fish which are taken from the stock. Above this point more fish are removed than can be replaced and the size of the stock reduces over time. This results in a smaller population, which means less fish for fishermen to catch. The fewer fish there are the harder it becomes to find and catch them, reducing the profitability of fishing. If a stock is overfished too much it may become severely depleted and may even collapse.

The ongoing recovery of Irish Sea Cod is a positive example of how when we take positive action to reduce fishing pressure then even severely depleted fish stocks can start to recover. Irish Sea Cod has gone from having a catch advice of zero tonnes from 2000 to 2017 to catch advice of 695t in 2018<sup>3</sup>.

### Irish Sea Cod Overfishing & Recovery

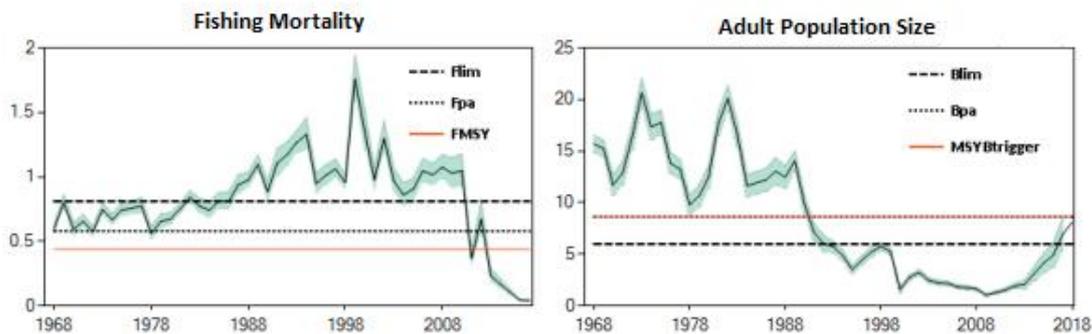


Figure 2: ICES Fishing Mortality and Spawning Stock Biomass for Irish Sea Cod 2018

Ending overfishing or ensuring that fishing limits are not greater than the Maximum Sustainable Yield is not an environmental or conservation objective per se. It is a fisheries management and economic objective which will secure the best economic, social and environmental outcomes for fishers and EU citizens. This position is supported by the Irish programme for government<sup>4</sup> which states that the sea that surrounds our island is our greatest national resource and that developing the potential of the 'blue economy' will be a priority for the current Government. The implementation of the of the CFP, which the Government has recognised as "*forward looking and progressive*" is seen as being integral to the realisation of this objective. In line with the CFP the Government have committed to "*setting quotas at Maximum Sustainable Yield and on a scientific basis, implementing the obligation to land, and an effective system of Regional decision making*".

<sup>3</sup> ICES advice 2018 for Irish Sea Cod <http://ices.dk/sites/pub/Publication%20Reports/Advice/2018/2018/cod.27.7a.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Irish Government (2016) A Programme For Partnership Government [https://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/eng/Work\\_Of\\_The\\_Department/Programme\\_for\\_Government/A\\_Programme\\_for\\_a\\_Partnership\\_Government.pdf](https://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/eng/Work_Of_The_Department/Programme_for_Government/A_Programme_for_a_Partnership_Government.pdf)



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## Overfishing in the EU and the December AGRIFISH Council

Within the CFP, Article 2.2 requires that fish stocks are restored to levels that can support the Maximum Sustainable Yield “by 2015 where possible and, on a progressive, incremental basis **at the latest by 2020 for all stocks.**” The EU has already failed to meet the 2015 deadline and with just over a year remaining before the 2020 deadline it is critical that the Irish Government follow scientific advice in upcoming negotiations.

Every December Fisheries Ministers like Ireland’s Michael Creed meet in Brussels to negotiate fishing limits for the North East Atlantic for the year ahead. According to the New Economics Foundation (NEF) who have analysed December Council decisions between 2001 and 2017<sup>5</sup>, on average seven out of every ten fishing limits set by Member States were above the limits advised by scientists. Whilst the percentage by which TACs were set above advice declined throughout this period (from 42% to 12%), the proportion of TACs set above advice did not.

One of the NEF’s conclusions was that “*Member States are the main drivers of overfishing, either because they are actively pushing for fishing limits to be set above scientific advice or they are failing to prevent it.*”

In their opinion recurring issues identified within past negotiations which drive overfishing include:

- a lack of transparency in the negotiations
- Decision making based on short-termism
- Effective lobbying from industry
- Perverse competition between member states

During last year’s December Council fisheries ministers continued to agree fishing limits for 2018 that were above the scientific advice. Of the fishing limits analysed by The Pew Charitable Trusts 44% were set exceeding the scientific advice. This is however a reduction from 54 % set exceeding advice in 2017, and 57 % set exceeding advice in 2016<sup>6</sup> (Figure 3).

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<sup>5</sup> NEF (2017) Landing The Blame: Overfishing in the Atlantic 2017 [http://neweconomics.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/NEF\\_LTB\\_ATLANTIC\\_2017.pdf](http://neweconomics.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/NEF_LTB_ATLANTIC_2017.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> PEW (2018) Analysis of Total Allowable Catches in the north-east Atlantic for 2018 [https://www.pewtrusts.org/-/media/assets/2018/02/20180220\\_pew\\_analysis\\_atlantic\\_tacs\\_for\\_2018.pdf?la=en&hash=14CA7D8B56E71E9C65C7693D208E379C15FF1C4](https://www.pewtrusts.org/-/media/assets/2018/02/20180220_pew_analysis_atlantic_tacs_for_2018.pdf?la=en&hash=14CA7D8B56E71E9C65C7693D208E379C15FF1C4)



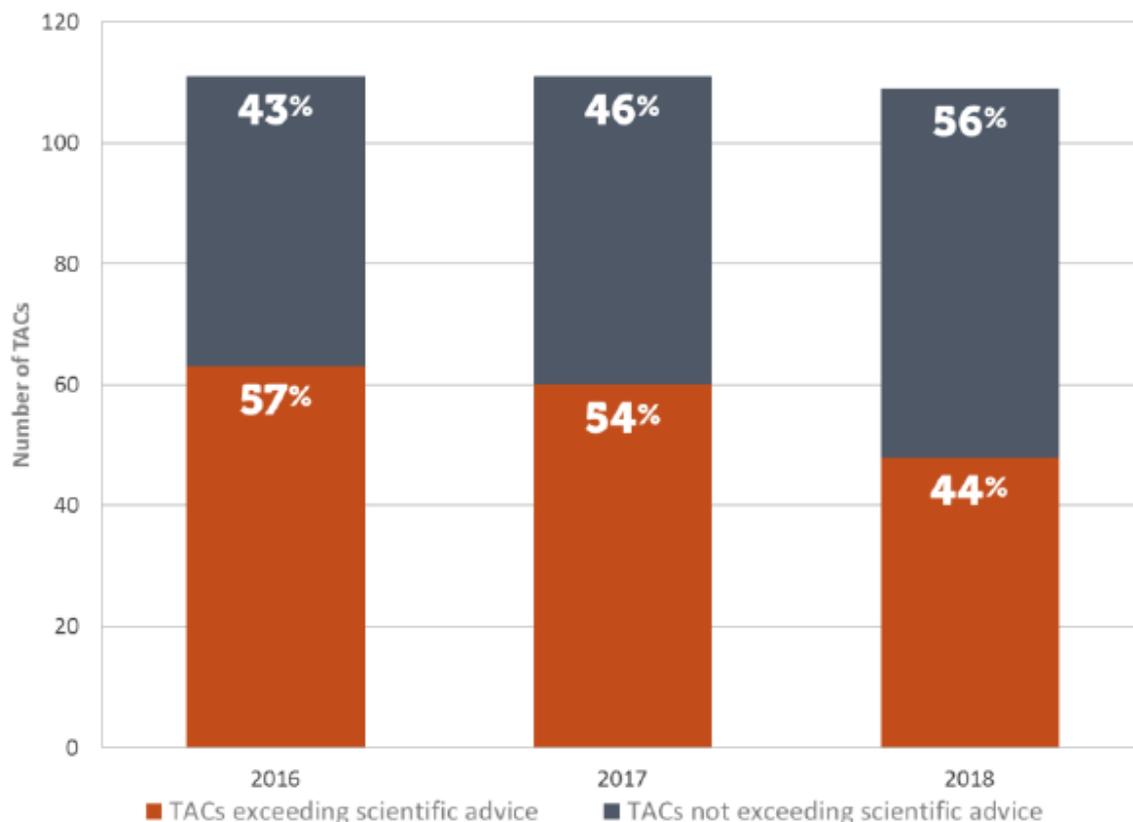
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**Figure 3: How TACs set by the Council in North-Western European waters compare with the scientific advice on fishing limits (2016-18)**

Another report commissioned by The Pew Charitable Trusts shows that while the extent to which fish stocks are being overfished improved between 2013 and 2017, the number of overfished stocks remains too high<sup>7</sup>. This is in line with the findings of the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF)<sup>8</sup> who found that while stock status has significantly improved in the North East Atlantic progress has slowed in the last few years and many stocks remain overfished and/or outside safe biological limits. In their opinion the progress that has been achieved seems too slow to ensure that all stocks will be rebuilt and at MSY by 2020.

<sup>7</sup> Poseidon Aquatic Resources Management Ltd., "Taking Stock: Progress Towards Ending Overfishing in the European Union" (2017),

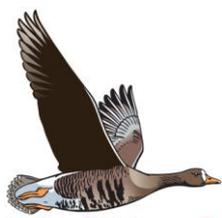
[http://www.consult-poseidon.com/fishery-reports/Poseidon\\_Taking\\_Stock\\_2017.pdf](http://www.consult-poseidon.com/fishery-reports/Poseidon_Taking_Stock_2017.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) – Monitoring the performance of the Common Fisheries Policy (STECF-Adhoc-18-01). Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2018, ISBN XXXXXX, doi:XXXXXXXX, PUBSY No



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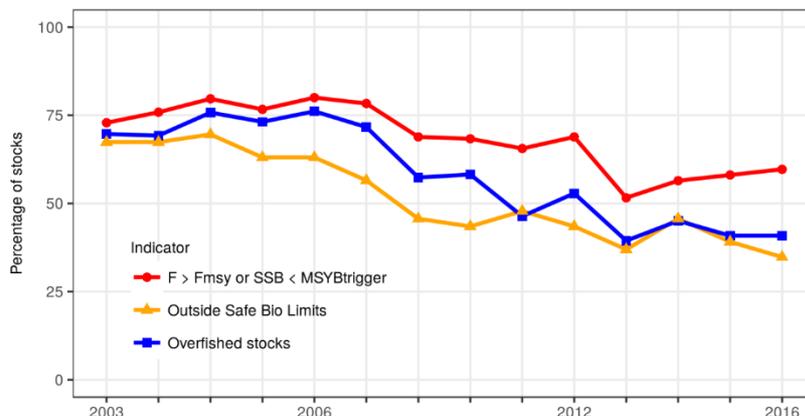
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**Figure 4: Trends in stocks status, 2003-2016. Three indicators are presented: Blue line: the proportion of overexploited stocks ( $F > F_{MSY}$ ) within the sampling frame (65 to 71 stocks fully assessed in the ICES area, depending on year); Orange line: the proportion of stocks outside safe biological limits ( $F > F_{pa}$  or  $B < B_{pa}$ ) (46 stocks); Red line:  $F > F_{MSY}$  or  $SSB < MSY_{Btrigger}$**

### Ireland's Role in Overfishing

Based on the NEF's assessments of EU December Councils between 2001 and 2017 it is clear that Ireland has historically played a negative role in the negotiations.

For 2018 Ireland was the country with the highest percentage of fishing quotas in excess of scientific advice. Ireland was involved in decisions that allow fishing at 18% above Maximum Sustainable Yield. The United Kingdom, Belgium, and the Netherlands respectively agreed fishing limits 15%, 8% and 8% above scientific advice.

The UK, Ireland, the Netherlands, and Denmark were the worst offenders in terms of the total tonnage of fishing limits set above advice. According to the NEF Ministers representing these Member States have received the largest quota increases above scientific advice in terms of tonnes and are therefore the most responsible for impeding the transition to sustainable fisheries in the EU.

Ireland has negotiated fishing quota for 2018 31,127 tonnes above scientific advice. This now means that Ireland has received fishing quota a total of 703,127 tonnes above scientific advice since 2001.<sup>9</sup> Ireland now must surely be considered among the worst offenders when it comes to the percentage of fishing limits set above scientific advice, having over the previous two years also ranked worst (26% above advice for 2017 fishing quotas)<sup>2</sup> and joint worst (10% above advice for 2016 fishing quotas)<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> NEF (2017) Landing The Blame: Overfishing in the Atlantic 2017 [http://neweconomics.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/NEF\\_LTB\\_ATLANTIC\\_2017.pdf](http://neweconomics.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/NEF_LTB_ATLANTIC_2017.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> NEF (2016) Landing the blame: overfishing in the Northeast Atlantic 2016 <https://www.birdwatchireland.ie/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=RtAF2Qmohz4%3D&tabid=1441>



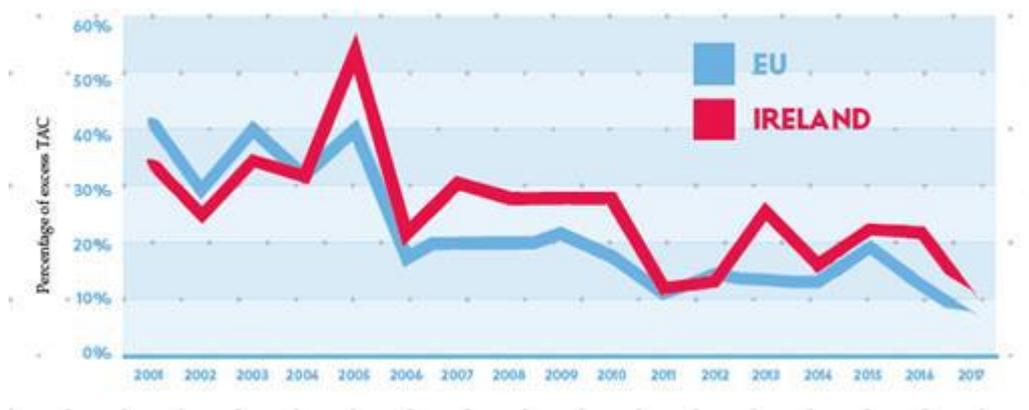
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**Figure 5: Percentage of Irish & EU TACs in excess of scientific advice in EU waters<sup>11</sup>.**

As in previous years Minister Michael Creed celebrated the fact that he had been able to secure Ireland’s fishing industry the right to overfish in 2018, stating: “The total €152m value of the whitefish quotas secured for the Irish fishing fleet amounts to an 8% increase in value from last year and a 3% increase in volume. I am satisfied that this is a good and balanced result overall.”<sup>14</sup>

This result was supported by the Killybegs Fishermen’s Organisation who felt they had achieved a ‘favourable result’ for several stocks and thanked ‘Minister Creed and his officials in working closely with’..them<sup>12</sup>.

### The Economic Benefits of Achieving MSY

Much of the economic debate relating to CFP reform has in the past focused on the short-term economic cost of reducing fishing pressure and transitioning to MSY rather than on the economic benefits of reaching MSY. This is clearly apparent in the Irish Governments submissions to the European Commission’s proposals on fishing opportunities over recent years. The Irish Governments economic arguments are based on the ‘Sustainability Impact Assessments’ prepared by BIM<sup>13</sup>. These assessments only calculate the cost of quota reductions for the year ahead and fail to consider the medium to long term economic gains in achieving MSY. This evidence according to the New Economics Foundation<sup>8</sup> is methodologically weak as it omits cost reductions, quota uptake, and price elasticities.

<sup>11</sup> NEF (2017) A Fair Fishing Deal for Ireland – How to Manage Irish Fisheries in the Public Interest

<http://bit.ly/2zpe4NY>

<sup>12</sup> NEF (2018) Landing The Blame: Overfishing in the Atlantic 2017 <http://neweconomics.org/2018/03/landing-blame-overfishing-atlantic-2018/>

<sup>13</sup> Fisheries TAC’s and Quotas 2013 Sustainability Impact Assessment

<https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/media/migration/publications/2012/SustainabilityImpactAssessment2013.docx>



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Fish are one of Ireland's and the EU's greatest renewable resources, if they are managed correctly. Aside from their innate value as living things and fundamental components of marine ecosystems fish can provide multiple benefits to society in the form of food, revenue and jobs. Overfishing results in smaller catches, lower revenues and fewer jobs. As the World Bank have put it "*biological overfishing has led to economic overfishing, which creates economic losses*<sup>14</sup>."

MSY from an economic standpoint must be the goal which we should strive for if we wish to achieve the point of greatest economic return<sup>15</sup>. Fishing at MSY levels which deliver sustainable catches is a precondition to landing more fish. According to the World Bank globally fisheries accrued an economic loss of about \$83 billion in 2012, compared with the what could have been generated by managing fisheries in line with scientific advice<sup>13</sup>. From an EU perspective it is estimated that in 2015 that by failing to exploit fish stocks below MSY the EU caused a total loss of 8.6 million tonnes of catch and €7.1 billion in revenues over the previous five-year period<sup>16</sup>.

According to research carried out in 2016 on the benefits of pathways to MSY for EU Northeast Atlantic fisheries, the study found achieving MSY for fish stocks in the Northeast Atlantic fisheries could generate about €4.64 billion in operating profit annually<sup>17</sup>. From an Irish perspective the economic benefits relative to 2012-14, of rebuilding EU fish stocks to MSY could provide Ireland with an additional 200,000 tonnes of fish landings annually. This would generate an additional €270 million in earnings potentially supporting 2,200 new jobs<sup>10</sup>.

Based on the STECF's most recent annual economic assessment of EU fisheries the revenue generated by fisheries in the NE Atlantic in 2016 was estimated at €2.66 billion, an increase of 8% from 2015<sup>18</sup>, with the Irish fleet generating €265 million. The net profit generated by the EU fleet was estimated at €417 million, an 84% increase on 2015. The recovery of some stocks is one important factor in the positive outlook for the sector. In this context the arguments which have been made in the past of the economic cost of transitioning to MSY are less convincing.

The positive outlook for the sector means that there can be no excuses in delaying our legal obligations. The economic benefits of rebuilding fish stocks will accrue even in the short-term due to the increased profitability of greater catches and the reduced costs of catching more abundant stocks<sup>14</sup>. Now is an ideal time to take the steps necessary to achieve compliance with the CFP. The sooner we transition to MSY the sooner we can enjoy the economic benefits.

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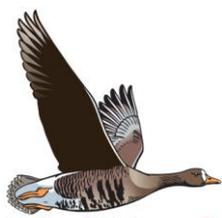
<sup>14</sup> World Bank (2017) The Sunken Billions Revisited, Progress and Challenges in Global Marine Fisheries  
<http://bit.ly/2B28Ow2>

<sup>15</sup> Client Earth (2017) Maximum Sustainable Yield in the Common Fisheries Policy – A Legal Briefing

<sup>16</sup> NEF (2015) Managing EU fisheries in the public interest, Results from the Bio-Economic Model of European Fleets  
<http://bit.ly/2mNcSOD>

<sup>17</sup> Guillen, J et al., (2016). Sustainability now or later? Estimating the benefits of pathways to maximum sustainable yield for EU Northeast Atlantic fisheries. *Marine Policy*, 72, 40-47.

<sup>18</sup> Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) – The 2018 Annual Economic Report on the EU Fishing Fleet (STECF-18-07). Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2018, JRC112940, ISBN 978-92-79-79390-5, doi:10.2760/56158



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### 2018 will be a critical year for the CFP

Given that the 2020 deadline to end overfishing is just over a year away this year's upcoming fisheries negotiations will play a critical role in realising the goals of the CFP.

#### November AGRIFISH Council – Deep Sea Fish

Every two years EU fisheries Ministers negotiate the TACs for deep sea stocks. This November the TACs for 2019 and 2020 will be agreed. In effect this means that this November's negotiation will be the CFP's deadline for these stocks. Ireland's main interest in Nov Council is receiving quota for deep sea fish so that we can trade it with France and Spain in exchange for other fish quota. Ireland receives quota for five deep sea species and six different stocks. Of these stocks four have been overfished for many years and one has zero catch advice for 2019-2020. Fishing for Orange Roughy is prohibited since the collapse of the stock in 2002. The Irish fishing industry does not target deep sea fish stocks.

**The Irish Government need to set Deep Sea fishing limits in line with scientific advice in November for 2019-2020. The failure to do so will ensure that the EU will fail to meet its 2020 objective to end overfishing a year out from the deadline.**

#### December AGRIFISH Council – NE Atlantic Stocks

Every year in December EU fisheries Ministers set the TACs for the majority of commercial EU fish species. Last year 124 TAC decisions were made (or confirmed) at this meeting. These negotiations are not public, only their outcomes are. This lack of transparency means that ministers are not on the hook when they ignore scientific advice and give priority to short-term interests that risk the health of fish stocks.

**The Irish Government must negotiate fishing limits for 2019 which are compatible with achieving the CFP's 2020 deadline.**

**BirdWatch Ireland would ask that the Joint Oireachtas Committee members raise these concerns with the Minister when he presents the Governments Sustainability Impact Assessment of EU Commission Proposal this November.**

Important TAC Negotiations in 2018		
Date	Negotiation	What will be agreed
19 <sup>th</sup> -20 <sup>th</sup> November	November AGRIFISH Council meeting, Brussels	Deep Sea TACs agreed for 2019-2020
26 <sup>th</sup> – 30 <sup>th</sup> November	EU Norway Negotiations, Bergen	EU/Norway shared TACs agreed for 2019
17 <sup>th</sup> -18 <sup>th</sup> December	December AGRIFISH Council meeting, Brussels	NE Atlantic TACs agreed for 2019



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