



Irish fish producers' organisation

Submission on behalf of Irish Fish Producers Organisation to Joint Committee on Agriculture and the Marine on the Sea Fisheries (Amendment) Bill 2021 and SFPA.

Sea Fisheries (Amendment) Bill 2021

The Irish Fish Producers Organisation (IFPO) has never opposed the introduction of Penalty Points for serious Fishing infringements for our members as per EU Regulation 1224/200. However, we are totally opposed to an unfair and unbalanced system as has been introduced in Ireland. Our position was fully supported by all members of the opposition in the Dail during the term of the last government but unfortunately the present administration chose to ignore their earlier concerns.

The present amendment mirrors the scope of the S.I 318 of 2020 which applied to owners of fishing vessels to allow for penalty points to be applied to Masters of fishing vessels. Unfortunately, the Minister has also chosen to repeat the mistakes of the earlier legalisation.

The main objection that IFPO members have to the original S.I is that an appeal can only be taken to High Court on a point of Law. Even though the Supreme Court found in favour of the Fishing Industry in previous cases this is again copper fastened in the present Bill. There is no doubt in this this restriction is being imposed to restrict the right of appeal by fishermen who fall foul of the SFPA.

Our second objection is the fact that Penalty Points will be retained by the Master even though he may be acquitted in the Irish Courts. This is nonsensical and hopefully will be changed.

Our third point of opposition relates to the inclusion of " Balance of probability" rather than reasonable doubt. These penalties have serious consequences both the master and the owner and have the potential to destroy their livelihood.

Sea Fisheries Protection Authority (SFPA)

Commission implementation Decision of 13/4/2021 revoking Irish Control Plan.

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The Irish Fishing Industry was gobsmacked to receive a communication from the SFPA of Friday April 15th advising us that the EU Commission had revoked the Irish Control Plan submitted for weighing fishery products in factories and co-ops in accordance with article 61(1) of Council Regulation No 1224/2009. This is an absolute disaster for the fishing Industry and the new measures being put in place by the SFPA are totally unworkable. Furthermore, they are totally detrimental to the quality of products being landed by Irish Vessels and have serious implications for food quality. The idea that a vessel landing 500 boxes of whitefish has to weight every individual box on the pier whilst removing ice and re-boxing is absolutely crazy. It has the potential to destroy our reputation for top quality seafood.

The recent report by PWC confirmed with everyone in the fishing Industry has been saying for a number of years in that the SFPA is a totally dysfunctional. The EU audit would appear to have found that the SFPA was totally incompetent, although despite repeated requests the wider fishing industry has been refused any details of the Commission audit in terms of control and the so-called irregularities.

It is of the utmost importance that a new control plan is lodged with the commission and that the status quo of prior arrangements to the Implementing Decision should remain.

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