

Oireachtas Members/EU December Council

Each year all the fishery organisations headed to Brussels in December to await the conclusion and final negotiations in the Council Ministers on fishing opportunities in the Atlantic, North Sea, the Mediterranean and Black Sea, and for deep-sea stocks in the following year. This has all changed in 2020 with the advent of Brexit. We now have negotiations taking place in November with the UK/EU Commission on over 119 different stocks that we fish in shared waters. We are hopeful that these talks will reach an agreement and conclude as we don't want to see a repeat of last year's situation when talks continued into 2021 and we had temporary 3- month and 7-month quotas.

It makes it very difficult for our administration to achieve changes to ICES proposals for TACS that we do not agree with. We have huge concerns for the proposals for Haddock in 6a,6b,7b-k, and 7a,Anglerfish in 6,Hake and Nephrops. There is limited opportunity to bargain with our European partners in affecting change. In many ways the December Council will become a non-event and will only be rubber stamping what has already agreed in these bi-lateral and Coastal state negotiations. We are also concerned that the Hague Preferences which helped secure additional quotas for Ireland in key stocks could be eroded going forward as they have never been copper fastened as Industry has demanded.

However, the Irish Fishing Industry fully expects that our Minister will be empowered by the Task Force report to sit down with our European partners and undue the wrongs we suffered a result of the Brexit agreement. Nobody is in any doubt that Ireland has paid an inordinate price when compared to that of our European fishing partners. We fully expect that the burden sharing we sought in the Task Force report will be top of our minister's agenda at this Council.

On the macro front we have serious concerns about the laissez-faire attitude of the EU Commission has taken with countries who are declaring unilateral quotas for mackerel. This has the potential to destroy a very important fish stock for Irish fishermen. We have seen Iceland, Greenland Faroes and Norway in the frame and the EU Commission has neither condemned these countries or proposed an action at EU level. Our Minister and Government must take a stand.

Decommissioning: Unfortunately we have reached a stage where there is a mismatch between our quotas and the size of our fleet. It is for this reason we have to support a decommissioning scheme, even though it means that we are giving up fishing capacity that we can never replace in the future. It is a necessary evil at this time. We would like to see if DAFM could bank some of this capacity so that it might be available for young fishermen in the future but DAFM are not interested in this proposal.

John Ward

8-12-2021