



Opening Statement Killybegs Fishermen's Organisation
Joint Oireachtas Committee on Agriculture, Food, and the
Marine 8th December 2021

2021 TACs and Quotas 2022 and Decommissioning

Chairman, and Committee Members, thank you for the opportunity to address you here today. You have requested that we address two issues namely TACs and Quotas 2022 and decommissioning.

Your invitation is a timely one as the annual TACs and Quotas discussions at the Fisheries Council are scheduled for next Sunday and Monday, 12th and 13th December, and the Government are due to decide, we understand, on the Task Force recommendations including the recommendation on decommissioning. Our opening statement covers the TACs and Quotas for next year but does not cover the percentage shares Ireland has of the various quotas as this will not be discussed at the December Fisheries Council. This is a key issue for the CFP review at end of next year when the Commission is due to report to the Council and the European Parliament. We have already made it clear to the Irish Government, and Commission that just producing a report is not acceptable and we must have a full review that encompasses changes to percentages sharing arrangements.

TACs and Quotas 2022

1. Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA)

The Commission's proposals regarding fishing opportunities in 2022 are made against a completely different backdrop due to the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) which came into effect on the 1st January 2021. The proposal does not have any figures for next year for the vast majority of stocks due to fact that the EU/UK bilateral negotiations are not completed. The UK will not be participating as an EU Member States but as a Coastal State going forward.

As a consequence of the TCA, the bilateral consultations with the UK have become a key step towards setting Fishing Opportunities for the 75 shared fish stocks, whose majority are of interest to us. The importance of the annual December Fisheries Council has been diminished with only a handful of autonomous stocks, Hague Preferences, and some other issues to be decided at the meeting. One of the other issues due for consideration is Danish mackerel quota in Norwegian waters which is a very important issue for Ireland. At

the time of writing, we are still awaiting the outcome of the EU/UK bilateral negotiations (which is part of the TCA) on the TACs for 75 stocks for next year. Should the bilateral negotiations not be completed before the Fisheries Council starts next Sunday the Council will not be in a position to sign off on the TACs and Quotas for next year. Instead, as happened last year they will set provisional TACs and Quotas. This is totally unsatisfactory and caused a major problem for the fishing sector last year with the final TACs and quotas for 2021 published seven months after the start of the year. On top of this we had the huge impact of the TCA (Brexit) on our key stocks. It is of critical importance that what happened in 2021 is not repeated for 2022.

2. CFP Objectives

The Commission's TACs and Quotas proposals focus on the biological objectives of Article 2.2 of the CFP. The proposals disregard those other objectives of the CFP dealing with economic, social and employment benefits, and contributing to the availability of food supplies as stated in Article 2.1 of the CFP. The Commission has an obligation to promote all the CFP objectives, and not rely on the Council of Fisheries Ministers to address these equally crucial issues, but continues to ignore this obligation in its proposals.

3. The Landing Obligation

The KFO supports increased focus on the development of improved selective fishing gear and the use of gear technology, which KFO has been proactively supporting, and use of quota exchange mechanisms and points out that catch data collection and reporting remain key elements of meeting the MSY objectives which underpin the Landing Obligation. The KFO considers the focus must be on avoidance and selectivity rather than landing dead fish.

The most critical aspect of the Landing Obligation is the threat of bringing the fishing of healthy sustainable stocks to a halt in advance of their quota being used by the unavoidable catch of species with zero TAC. The KFO fully supports the same approach from 2021 regarding by-catch provisions for zero stocks and adopting the same methodology, as agreed for 2021, for such stocks in 2022. The strategy of low-level TACs for by-catches only, thus allowing depleted stocks to be re-built, has been critically important in keeping an array of sustainable fisheries viable and must be maintained.

4. Quality Assurance of ICES Advice

The KFO appreciates the positive initiative taken by ICES in developing an Advisory Plan with a Priority list which begins with "***Assuring quality - Assure that quality encompasses the entire process from data collection to the publication of objective and independent advice.***" (Advisory Plan, ICES, 2019) and the effort ICES has made in addressing quality assurance in stock assessments. Nevertheless, KFO continues to

witness a lack of consistency in the advice for several stocks as outlined in the paragraphs below and highlights the critical need for quality assurance across all assessments in accordance with the ICES advisory plan and particularly the Transparent Assessment Framework (the TAF System). KFO is of firm view that each ICES stock assessment advice in the headline of the advice should indicate whether or not stock in question has gone through the TAF system or not.

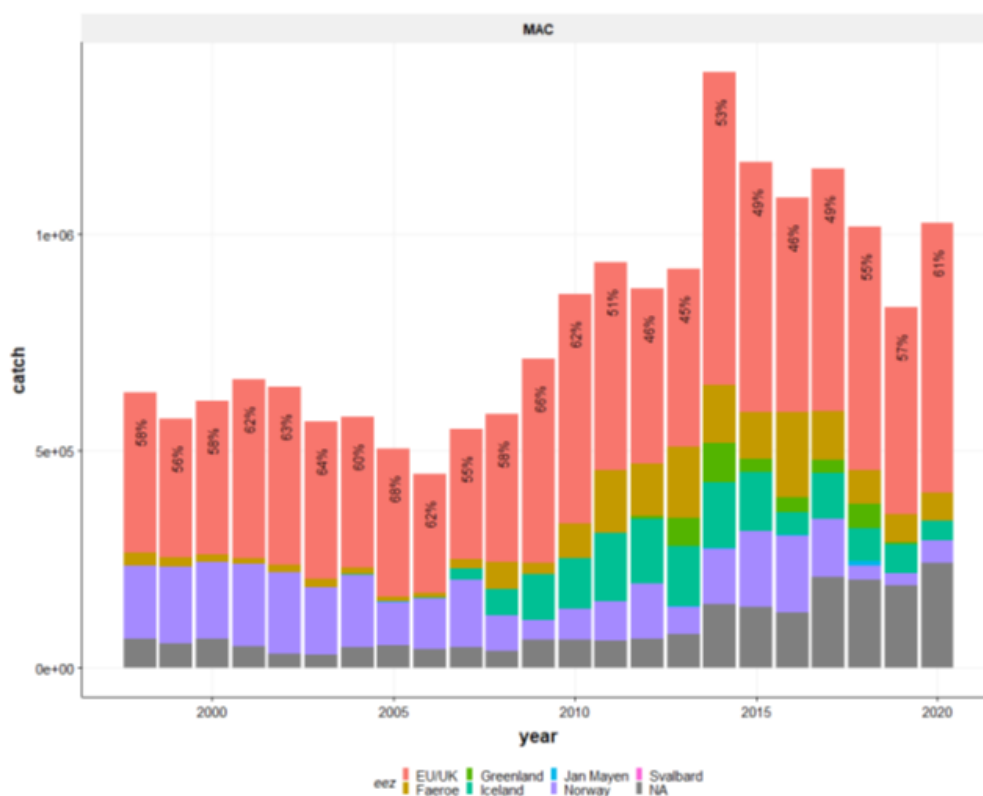
5. Stock Issues – ICES Advice for 2022 TACs

In the absence of the usual TAC proposals from the Commission, due to the EU/UK bilateral as highlighted above, the KFO is basing its comments on the ICES scientific advice for those stocks of interest to Ireland and made available over past months.

Pelagic Stocks

- a. **Mackerel: TAC for 2022: 794,920t.** Norway and the Faroe Islands decided to unilaterally increase their mackerel quotas by 55%. The result of this will be that the ICES 2022 TAC will be overshoot by 42%. In light of this, the KFO requests immediate action by the Minister and the Commission to urge Norway and the Faroe Islands to stop the massive overfishing of mackerel in the Northeast Atlantic and jeopardizing the sustainable management of the stock. It is critical that the COM act decisively against this irresponsible and reckless behaviour. Therefore, there is an urgent need to adopt a sharing arrangement to respect catch levels in the Coastal Zone and to stop the huge increase in the international catches. The graph below shows catches in international waters is high and increasing. KFO is of a firm view that the management of fishing in

international waters should be limited to a maximum of 10% of overall catches.



- b. **Herring (6a,7b c).** Zero catch options have been advised again for this stock due to the inability to split the stock into its two respective components. The good news is the current genetics project, which is completed, is yielding significant results which in future will enable the stock to be split. The benchmark for this stock has started and is due to be completed in February 2022. We are expecting that the genetics project will enable the stock to be split into two respective components
- c. **Boarfish:** ICES Advice is for of 22,791t for boarfish in both 2022 and 2023 which represents a 19% increase on the previous advice. The stock is estimated to have been increasing since 2016 with increased recruitment seen in the acoustic survey in recent years. This stock needs to be moved from ICES Category 3 to Category 1 as soon as possible

Demersal Stocks Area 6

- a. **Whiting in 6a :** The whiting in 6a benchmark in 2021 has significantly changed the perception of the stock. KFO welcomes the move from category 5 to category 1 as well as an advice that is not for zero TAC for the first time in many years. It is good news that the experience of fishers on the ground is reflected in the science.

- b. Cod in 6a.** ICES issued zero catch advice for cod in division 6a. The management measures taken so far around this stock need to be questioned and evaluated, as they have not resulted in a recovery of the stock. A strong focus needs to be placed on rebuilding this stock, which takes into account the potential consequences of other aspects like climate change and predation. The benchmark for 6a cod that was carried out this year identified that the stock identity issues between the stock in the northern part of 6a and the one in the North Sea remain to be resolved. Should the stock in 6a be the same as the one in the North Sea, this would completely change the assessment. It is important that further work on genetics is carried out to solve this important issue. It is imperative that the Commission's approach of setting low-level TACs for by-catches only is maintained as part of the 2022 TACs and Quota to avoid the premature closure of a vast array sustainable fisheries.

- c. Haddock in 6a:** ICES advice for Haddock in 6a is for a very significant increase of 125%. Haddock in division 6a is assessed as one single stock with the North Sea, with 10% of the TAC being allocated to division 6a. Note that the two areas are considered separately in terms of management. Last year, there was an increase in the TAC but the full scientific advice was not followed due to the North Sea tri-lateral negotiations between the EU, the UK and Norway agreeing a lesser increase for the North Sea which had a knock-on effect of also a lesser increase in 6a. KFO is requesting that this is not repeated for 2022 and 6a is treated differently to the North Sea if the decision in the tri-lateral negotiations is to again revert to a lower increase than advised.

- d. Anglerfish in 6:** The KFO is concerned that the Anglerfish in Area 6 is still a Category 3 ICES assessment which in KFO's view is leading to decreases in the stock. It is imperative that this is moved to Category 1 ICES assessment similar to Anglerfish in Area 7.

Demersal Stocks Celtic Sea

- a. Northern Hake:** The ICES Advice is for 24% reduction. It is difficult to reconcile this reduction with the very high stock size, low fishing mortality and good recruitment. A benchmark is planned for this stock before the end of the year and it is hoped that some of the issues around this stock -the perception and the output from the assessment - can be resolved.
- b. Cod 0 catch options.** It is imperative that the Commission's approach of setting low-level TACs for by-catches only is maintained as part of the 2022 TACs and Quota to avoid the premature closure of a vast array sustainable fisheries.

- c. **Anglerfish in 7:** The ICES advice is showing a 6% increase which is welcome. It should be noted the anglerfish in Area 7 is Category 1 unlike anglerfish in Area 6

Demersal Stocks Irish Sea

ICES has issued reports on the ecosystem-based management approach for stocks in the Irish Sea. The KFO is convinced that such an approach should be adopted for the stocks in the Irish Sea which would resolve the significant difficulties we have when addressing mixed fisheries assessment and management.

- a. **Whiting: 0 catch options.** It is imperative that the Commission's approach of setting low-level TACs for by-catches only is maintained as part of the 2022 TACs and Quota to avoid the premature closure of a vast array sustainable fisheries.
- b. **Cod in 7a:** KFO is concerned regarding the significant reduction which could have major implications for the mixed fisheries early closure. The eco-system approach to fishery management should be used to address this issue.
- c. **Haddock in 7a:** The KFO is concerned regarding the 17% reduction as the fishing pressure is declining and has been below F_{MSY} since 2012. Quarter 1 survey showed a very low estimate for recruitment. KFO considers that the Quarter 4 survey should be looked at to see if low recruitment has been confirmed

In conclusion the TCA will have a major effect on TACs and quotas going forward, and it is essential that Irish stakeholders and their representatives have input to EU/UK negotiations as they have had to negotiations prior to Brexit. The December Fisheries Council will no longer be the key decision maker. The ICES Transparent Assessment Framework (TAF) is a key issue for all stakeholders and will encourage greater buy-in and compliance going forward. All possible routes must be explored to ensure the reckless and irresponsible actions of Norway and the Faroe Islands regarding mackerel are not repeated in 2022.

Decommissioning

1. Burden Sharing

The Task Force (TF) set up by Minister McConalogue in February 2021 produced its final report at the beginning of October. The TF recommended seventeen different schemes that should be implemented as a matter of urgency at an estimated cost of €423 million to try and ameliorate some of losses under TCA and utilising the Brexit Adjustment Reserve Fund (BAR). One of the seventeen schemes is a

recommendation on a voluntary permanent cessation (decommissioning) scheme of whitefish vessels. Before I deal with the decommissioning as requested by Committee it is of critical importance to highlight that burden sharing is the number one priority for the KFO and has been fully recognised in the TF report.

KFO has carried out a comprehensive analysis both in volume (tonnes) and value (€) of the Brexit fallout and its serious negative consequences for Ireland which will continue to mount up until 2025. This analysis has been recently confirmed as correct by the Commission's own Scientific Technical and Economic Committee on Fisheries (STECF). Both analyses show very clearly the disproportionate cost Ireland has to carry in the transfers of quota to the UK under the TCA which amounts to approximately 40% of the entire cost to the EU of the quota transfers to the UK when you take into account the real uptakes (catches) of the quotas transferred by the Members States.

The TF set out in detail thirteen targeted actions on burden sharing in its report covering pelagic and demersal quotas, including specific challenges arising and how the actions may be progressed. The TF recommends that all options to alleviate the loss of quota share be pursued at every available opportunity and treated as a matter of urgency. This should involve a whole of Government approach supported by a lobbying exercise by industry and Government at all EU levels. The KFO continues to devote considerable time and effort to this key priority and sees the upcoming Fisheries Council as an opportunity to address the internal EU burden sharing issue.

2. Voluntary Permanent Cessation (Decommissioning)

The introduction of a voluntary permanent cessation scheme to permanently remove vessels from the Irish fleet register and help restore balance between fleet capacity and available quota post-TCA was discussed at length by the TF. A general consensus emerged amongst the membership of the Task Force that such a scheme is required, in combination with the short-term support measures, longer term onshore initiatives and actions relating to burden sharing.

The TF considered voluntary permanent cessation will help to restore balance between fleet capacity and available quotas, therefore ensuring the profitability of vessels remaining. The TF recommended that the proposed restructuring programme involving the elements detailed including appropriate payments to crew should be developed into fully costed schemes as a matter of urgency, noting that to avail of BAR funding permanent cessation must be completed by the end of 2022.

The Task Force recommended that a package of tax measures similar to the 2008 permanent cessation scheme be put in place. The Task Force also recommended that the 5-year preclusion for crew re-entering the sector following the receipt of support that is included under the EMFAF should be omitted from the scheme if at all possible. Additionally, The Task Force acknowledged that the full impact of the quota transfers under the TCA will not be seen until 2022. In 2021 decreases in demersal quota under the TCA have largely been offset by quota carryovers from 2020. This, in combination with the fact that the full effects of a voluntary decommissioning

scheme will not be seen immediately, the Task Force recommended the need to extend the temporary cessation scheme into 2022.

The KFO as a member of TF supported the voluntary permanent cessation in demersal sector but did add in the TF report that in supporting the voluntary permanent cessation scheme it is very concerned that the open-ended nature of the whitefish quota management arrangements has not been addressed in the TF report which has the potential to undermine the effectiveness of the voluntary permanent cessation scheme. Furthermore, every effort must be made to change the state aid guideline on the requirement to repay temporary cessation aid in the event that a vessel chose to apply for voluntary permanent cessation.

Ends