

Joint Committee on Agriculture, Food and the Marine

Sinéad McSherry, Assistant Secretary General – Fishing Opportunities (Consideration of COMs (2023)495, 587 and 578)

24 January 2024

Speaking Note

Cathaoirleach, Committee Members, I'd like to thank you for the invitation to speak to you today about fishing opportunities.

My name is Sinéad McSherry and I am the Assistant Secretary General with responsibility for Seafood and Marine in the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. I am joined by my colleagues:

- Suzanne Brennan, Head of the Marine Programmes Division, and
- Anna O'Sullivan, Head of Sea-fisheries Policy and Management Division

Before I go into the detail of the Commission proposals highlighted by the Committee, I will give a brief overview of the process for setting the fishing opportunities for the EU fleet.

TAC-setting process

Most of the commercial fish stocks of interest to the Irish fleet are covered by the Total Allowable Catch – or TAC – and Quota system.

Following the UK's withdrawal from the EU, some 40 of the fish stocks in which Ireland has an interest, which were previously exclusively Union resources, are now shared resources under international law. Only two small stocks (Plaice and Sole in ICES Areas 7bc – off our West Coast) for which Ireland has quota, are regarded as EU only.

Mackerel, Blue Whiting and Atlanto-Scandian Herring are agreed at Coastal State negotiations. The TAC for Albacore Tuna is set through the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas.

The European Commission has sole competence to negotiate with Third Countries on behalf of the EU on the setting of fishing opportunities.

The negotiations of significant interest to Ireland are Coastal States, EU-UK, EU-NO-UK and EU-NO.

The process for the negotiations is as follows. The EU Council sets down a mandate for the negotiations. Member States are kept closely involved throughout the negotiations. Meetings between the Commission, Council Secretariat and Member States are held regularly during the negotiations. Member States are kept fully briefed by the Commission and advised of progress and, in turn, input their positions and concerns through these co-ordination meetings. The Commission also undertakes to keep stakeholders informed of the progress of the negotiations.

Once agreement has been reached, for example, between the EU and UK, the Council must consider and approve the draft Written Record of the negotiations before it can be signed by the Commission on behalf of the EU.

Minister McConalogue met with stakeholders throughout the negotiation process. The Minister also undertook a Sustainability Impact Assessment (SIA) as part of the preparation for the TAC-setting process. The SIA draws its conclusions from a consultation process with all major stakeholders and expert contributions from the Marine Institute (MI) and Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM). The objective of the SIA is to look at the overall impacts the proposal could have on the sustainability of the fishing sector from a biological, economic and social perspective. The Minister also met with stakeholders, including fishing industry representatives and environmental NGOs, to give a further opportunity to stakeholders to outline their positions. The Minister presented the SIA to this Committee on 25 October 2023.

COM (2023) 587

Regarding the Commission proposals highlighted by the Committee, I will begin with COM (2023) 587. This is the proposal for the “main” TAC and Quota Regulation for 2024, covering the stocks found in North Atlantic and North Sea. This includes the stocks found in the waters around Ireland.

Where the scientific advice for a stock hasn't yet been received, or international negotiations for stocks are still ongoing when the proposal is published, the fishing opportunities for those stocks are marked as *pro memoria* (*pm*) in the proposal. As these negotiations had not concluded when proposal COM (2023) 587 was published, most of the fishing opportunities were listed as *pm*.

In previous years, as the EU-UK negotiations had not concluded by the deadline set out in the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement, provisional TACs and quotas had to be agreed by Ministers at the December Fisheries Council. This was to ensure continuity for fishing fleets pending the outcome of the negotiations.

However, this was not necessary this year as all third country negotiations concluded in advance of the December Council, meaning that the final, full year quotas would apply from 1st January 2024.

The Coastal States negotiations for 2024 took place in October and the Coastal State parties agreed on setting the TACs for Coastal State stocks of Mackerel, Blue Whiting and Atlanto-Scandian Herring.

The EU-UK negotiations for 2024 began on 24th October 2023 and the Written Record was signed by both parties on the 5th December. The trilateral negotiations between the EU, UK and Norway began on 20th October and concluded on 8th December 2023. The bilateral negotiations between the EU and Norway began on 7th November and concluded with the Agreed Record being signed by parties on 8th December.

The final outcome of the TAC setting process for 2024 represents a balanced result overall. We have increases for a number of our important commercial stocks including prawns in the Porcupine Bank, Celtic Sea Monkfish and Megrin and North-west Haddock and Whiting. Restricted, by-catch only TACs have been set for vulnerable stocks to help them recover.

Most significantly, Minister McConalogue successfully negotiated a permanent allocation of additional Mackerel for the Irish fleet, worth approximately €3 million annually for Irish fishers.

COM (2023)495

Commission proposal COM (2023) 495 relates to an amendment of the 2023 TAC and Quota Reg to set the definitive TAC for anchovy in waters off coast of Spain and Portugal and waters around Madeira and Canary Islands.

When the 2023 TAC and Quota Regulation was adopted, the scientific advice for this stock had not yet been published and provisional TAC had been set to allow for fishing to continue.

This proposal did not impact on Ireland as we do not have quota for this stock.

COM (2023) 578

Commission proposal COM (2023) 578 relates to setting fishing opportunities for stocks in the Mediterranean and the Black Seas for 2024.

Ireland is not involved in this proposal as we do not have fisheries in these areas.

Conclusion

I hope this information has been helpful.

My colleagues and I will be happy to take any questions you may have.