

Joint Committee on Agriculture, Food and the Marine

22.01.2021

Opening Remarks

- The Government welcomes the conclusion of the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA). The TCA, together with the Withdrawal Agreement, including the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland, means that Ireland's key Brexit objectives have been achieved.
- The EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement will, unfortunately, have a negative impact on our fishing industry. However, the Committee must recognise that this impact would have been far greater had the Barnier Task Force agreed to UK demands or had we been in a no-deal scenario which would have seen all EU vessels barred from UK waters and their subsequent displacement into Ireland's fishing zone.
- The Agreement does not, and cannot, replicate the situation when the UK was an EU Member State. But, while the outcome on fisheries was a difficult compromise, I can assure you that the Government will work to ensure that the fisheries sector, and the coastal communities that depend on it, are supported through the period ahead.

Loss of Quota Share

- Last week, I published a Preliminary Analysis of Reduction of Fisheries Quota Shares under the EU/UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement which details the level of quota transfers for Ireland across the different stocks. This compares the quota shares allocated to Ireland in 2020 and the corresponding new quota shares for 2021-2016.

- The quota reductions are to be spread out until 2026. The aggregate final quota transfer by Ireland is estimated to be €43m by that time, which amounts to a 15% reduction compared to the overall value of the 2020 Irish quotas.
- However, the upfront change for 2021 is very sizeable at around 60%. These reductions across the different stocks will be felt immediately by our fishing industry when the full annual quotas for 2021 are determined in March.
- On key western mackerel stock, our quota share reduces from our current 21% in 2020 to 18% for 2021 and this will reduce to 16% for 2025. This represents a 26% transfer of our quota to the UK by 2025.
- In Ireland's largest fishery for our whitefish fleet, Nephrops (Prawns) in Area 7, our quota share reduces from our current 37% to 34% in 2021 and is reduced to 32% in 2025. This represents a 14% transfer of our quota by 2025.
- There are also notable reductions in many other whitefish stocks. These include substantial reductions in the whitefish quotas off the north west and west of Scotland to such important stocks as haddock 23% transfer; megrim a 19% transfer and monkfish a 20% transfer to the UK.

Equitable Burden Sharing and Meeting with Barnier

- The Analysis of Reduction of Fisheries Quota Shares document also shows that Ireland contributed approximately 15% of the total value of our 2020 fisheries quotas to the Agreement. For other Member States this figure is considerably less.

- The quota transfers required of Ireland are clearly disproportionate and the outcome is inequitable, in terms of burden sharing. The analysis that my experts have undertaken and which is published on the Government website clearly demonstrates this inequitable burden placed on Ireland.
- Just yesterday I met with Michel Barnier, the EU Fisheries Commissioner Sinkevičius and the Ministers of the Fisheries Group of 8 Member States on fisheries related matters post-Brexit.
- At the meeting, I made it clear that Ireland considers that the transfer to the UK involves a very high share of some of our most important stocks. I pointed out that within the CFP, Ireland contributes by providing rich fishing grounds for EU Member States and our Exclusive Economic Zone provides spawning and nursery grounds on many of the core stocks on which are shared with the UK and on which the TCA quota package and the CFP depend.
- I also strongly expressed my disappointment that the principle of burden sharing within the EU Member States has not been adequately respected. I made clear that the inequitable relative contribution of quota share by Ireland is contributing to a strong sense of grievance within our fishing industry and indeed more broadly. I pushed strongly that a mechanism must be found within the EU Commission and relevant Member States to find solutions.
- I intend to continue to keep the focus on this situation and use any opportunity available to seek constructive solutions that would help to alleviate this unacceptable position.

Third Country Designated Ports

- UK vessels, including Northern Ireland vessels, have had a pattern of landings into many Irish ports prior to the UK leaving the EU.
- Many of these vessels are based in Irish ports despite being registered in Northern Ireland. Following a detailed examination, in consultation with the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority, I decided to designate five additional Irish ports for UK registered Northern Ireland vessel landings for both Illegal, Unregulated and Unreported (IUU) legislation and North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC) requirements.
- The five new ports designated are Ros a Mhíl, Howth, Greencastle, Rathmullen and Burtonport. These join Killybegs and Castletownbere which continue to be designated for landings from vessels of any Third Country origin. I have notified the EU Commission to ensure that the necessary notifications and requirements are in place to have these ports operational from early February 2021.
- Under the new designations Ros a Mhíl and Howth will be able to accommodate landings of demersal fish from vessels under 26 metres and will operate Monday to Friday from 10am to 10pm. Greencastle, Rathmullen and Burtonport will be designated for non-quota species landings from vessels under 18 metres and will operate from 2pm to 8pm from Monday to Friday.
- From 1st January 2021, the United Kingdom is a third country and subject to IUU legislation and NEAFC requirements. This means that any UK, including Northern Ireland, registered vessels must comply with third country landing requirements when landing in the EU, including Irish ports and is a direct result of Brexit and included in the Protocol on

Ireland / Northern Ireland. Up until a conclusion of an agreement on the future relationship between the UK and the EU on Christmas Eve, it remained unclear whether Northern Ireland vessels that had access to Irish waters would continue to do so.

- The designation of extra Irish ports is an important decision, which will allow fishers in small vessels to continue their livelihoods following Brexit. It is important now more than ever, to support our fishers and fishing communities and to do all we can do help them continue their livelihoods.

Authorisations to fish in UK waters

Voisinage arrangements – 0-6 nautical mile zone Northern Ireland

- Last night I met with Minister Poots to discuss the implications that the TCA has had on the fishing industry for both Irish and Northern Irish registered vessels.
- I have confirmed with the Commission that the *Voisinage* arrangements can continue as before. However, the new UK Fisheries Act 2020 will require Irish vessels to obtain a licence to access the Northern Ireland 0-6 nautical mile zone
- Northern Ireland vessels will similarly require an authorisation under EU Regulations to continue to fish in Ireland's 0-6 nautical mile zone.

12-200 nautical mile zone (UK exclusive economic zone)

- The work to authorise EU vessels to fish in UK waters before the 1st January 2021 was very challenging, especially given the short window between the conclusion of the TCA and the start of the New Year. My Department has worked closely with the Commission to ensure that fishing vessels that traditionally fished in UK waters were granted access by the UK authorities. The temporary authorisations granted to 220 vessels expired last evening.
- Some of the additional data being requested by the UK to issue full licences has caused difficulties and there is uncertainty as to when the UK will issue annual licences for all of the 220 vessels. In order to avoid a situation that vessels fishing at present in UK waters would be operating without a UK permission, my Department has issued temporary authorisations for a further three weeks. This arrangement has been agreed between the EU Commission and the UK authorities and the UK will publish a list of the vessels operating under the temporary licence. This will give time to ensure that all UK demands are met and annual licences are issued, by the UK and EU authorisations issued by my Department.
- The focus to date has been on vessels that have in the past two years fished in UK waters or on operators who request an authorization to fish in UK waters. However, given our geographical proximity to UK waters, we have sought that all our fleet be granted access by the UK to their waters. My Department will continue to work to maximise the number of vessels granted access.

Supports

- On 25 December 2020, the European Commission published a Proposal for an EU Regulation establishing a Brexit Adjustment Reserve. The objective of the proposed BAR is to provide support to counter the adverse consequences of the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union in Member States, regions and sectors, in particular those that are worst affected by that withdrawal, and to mitigate the related impact on the economic, social and territorial cohesion. The draft Regulation is subject to negotiations in the Council and European Parliament and its provisions may change.
- It is proposed that the BAR would have a budget of €5.37 billion in current prices and that approximately €1 billion would be allocated to Ireland in 2021 as pre-financing to assist Ireland in funding appropriate measures in 2021 and 2022 to assist the worst affected sectors of our economy.
- Government is very aware that our food sector, not least our fisheries sector, is particularly impacted by the outcome of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement and is examining how best to deploy Ireland's proposed allocation under the Reserve to help our economy adjust to the new arrangements.

Task Force

- I have listened carefully to the representatives of the industry and indeed I have met individual fishermen who are facing a difficult situation. I have reflected on how to ensure that the funding made

available to the sector in the BAR is focused to meet the challenges of the sector and of the coastal communities most impacted. I am minded to set up a Task Force involving seafood industry representatives and representatives of other stakeholders to provide recommendations on the appropriate measures that will best support the sector and the local coastal communities. I intend to set out in the arrangements and the terms of reference for this Task Force later next week.

- I will ask the Task Force to immediately focus on possible arrangements for a temporary fleet tie-up scheme to counter the impacts of the reduction in quotas which will impact from the beginning of April. When the task force has recommended on a tie up scheme and it is implemented it would provide short term assistance to fishing vessels most impacted by the quota agreements with the UK kicking in in the second quarter of the year.
- The Task Force will I hope also provide recommendations on a range of other actions and measures that will allow the sector and the coastal communities to adjust and develop so as to counter both direct and downstream impacts on the wider seafood sector and coastal communities.