

# DÁIL ÉIREANN

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## AN COMHCHOISTE UM THALMHAÍOCHT AGUS MUIR

## JOINT COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND THE MARINE

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*Dé hAoine, 22 Eanáir 2021*

*Friday, 22 January 2021*

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Tháinig an Comhchoiste le chéile ag 10 a.m.

The Joint Committee met at 10. a.m.

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Comhaltaí a bhí i láthair/Members present:

Teachtaí Dála/Deputies	Seanadóirí/Senators
Matt Carthy,	Victor Boyhan,
Michael Collins,	Lynn Boylan,
Michael Fitzmaurice,	Paul Daly,
Joe Flaherty,	Tim Lombard.
Paul Kehoe,	
Pádraig Mac Lochlainn,*	
Michael Ring.	

\* In éagmais/In the absence of Deputy Martin Browne.

I láthair/In attendance: Deputies Fergus O'Dowd and Thomas Pringle.

Teachta/Deputy Jackie Cahill sa Chathaoir/in the Chair.

## Business of Joint Committee

**Chairman:** Apologies have been received from Deputy Browne and Senator O'Donovan. Deputy Mac Lochlainn is substituting for Deputy Browne. Due to the current Covid-19 restrictions, only the Chairman and staff are present in the committee room and all members must join remotely from elsewhere in the parliamentary precincts. The secretariat can issue invitations to join the meeting on Microsoft Teams. Members may not participate in the meeting from outside the parliamentary precincts. Members should mute their microphones when they are not making contributions and use the "raise hand" function to indicate if they wish to speak. Speaking slots will be prioritised for members of the committee. I also remind members to turn off their mobile telephones.

The agenda for today is a resumed discussion on the impact of Brexit on the fishing industry. The meeting will be in two parts. From 10 a.m. until 10.55 a.m., we will meet with the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Deputy McConalogue. From 11 a.m. until 11.55 a.m., we will meet with representatives from the Irish Fish Producers Organisation, IFPO, the Killybegs Fishermen's Organisation, KFO, the Irish South and West Fishermen's Organisation, ISWFPO, and the Irish South and East Fish Producers Organisation, ISEFPO. The meeting will be suspended for five minutes between the first and second sessions to allow witnesses to change over.

### Impact of Brexit on Fisheries Industry: Discussion (Resumed)

**Chairman:** I welcome the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine and Dr. Cecil Beamish, assistant secretary at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, both of whom are joining us remotely. We have received the Minister's opening statement and it has been circulated. Due to Covid, we have limited time and the committee has agreed that the opening statement will be taken as read so that we can use the full session for questions and answers. Is that okay with the Minister?

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** That is perfect. It is no problem at all.

**Chairman:** Before we begin, I have an important notice on parliamentary privilege. Witnesses are protected by absolute privilege in respect of their evidence to the committee. However, if they are directed by the committee to cease giving evidence on a particular matter and they continue to do so, they are entitled thereafter only to a qualified privilege in respect of their evidence. They are directed that only evidence connected with the subject matter of these proceedings is to be given and they are asked to respect the parliamentary practice to the effect that, where possible, they should not criticise or make charges against any person, persons or entity by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable. Those participating in the committee meeting from a location outside the parliamentary precincts are asked to note that the constitutional protections afforded to those participating within the parliamentary precincts do not extend to them. No clear guidance can be given on whether or the extent to which their participation is covered by absolute privilege of a statutory nature. I will open the meeting to questions from members.

**Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn:** The Minister took some questions in the Dáil yesterday on the concerns being raised here. We have the statements from producer organisations and

some of the leaders of our fishing industry in Ireland and they make for stark reading in terms of the impact felt. Yesterday, I said to the Minister that in his home county of Donegal the industry has estimated that there could be a hit of up to 400 job losses. In an industry that was already struggling to survive, the amount of fish we have lost is completely unsustainable. The message from people in the industry is that they are not looking for financial compensation. They are looking for a fair allocation of the fish in our exclusive economic zone and in other waters under the jurisdiction of the Common Fisheries Policy and, indeed, in waters belonging to the UK, which we are now a trading partner with.

This is a serious crisis. I was taken aback by some of the Minister's comments yesterday. I appreciate he has a huge portfolio, which includes agriculture, food and the marine and that he relies on advice from officials in the Department but it is time those official were confronted on the advice they are giving him. I refer to one thing the Minister said yesterday. He said fishing was the last issue to be resolved in the negotiations and that that was a sign of how hard people were working on the issue. However, that is entirely contrary to the view of the industry. In particular, I refer to the comments of Seán O'Donoghue of the Killybegs Fishermen's Organisation. He said that they always understood that this would not be allowed to happen and that fisheries would not be left as the last item on the agenda to be resolved because that would leave it vulnerable to being sacrificed again. That was his commentary which he was very clear about because he was part of the partnership of other EU member state fishing organisations, called the European Fisheries Alliance. He was very clear that there was to be a united approach, that it was to be linked to the trade negotiations and that it would not be the last item on the agenda. What has happened is that because it was the last item on the agenda there was a rush to get the deal over the line and our fishermen were sacrificed and they took a disproportionate hit. This is a profound injustice. We need the Government to understand that this is a profound injustice. We need the Government to make this clear.

I put my first question to the Minister. Will he now renegotiate a fair share of the fish in Irish waters for the Irish fishing industry? Will he make it clear to his European partners that this is an injustice? I am really disappointed that the Government voted against an amendment to the motion on the EU-UK Trade and Co-operation Agreement in recent days which merely called for it to renegotiate the Common Fisheries Policy to get a fair deal and a fair share of the fish in Irish waters for Irish fishers. That was all we were asking for. It was a very conservative ask and it was voted down.

Will the Minister take the opportunity to make it clear that he understands the seriousness of this crisis for the fishing industry and that he will go back and do everything he can to renegotiate a fair deal? That is my first question.

**Deputy Charlie McConalogue:** As Deputy Mac Lochlainn said, there is undoubtedly an impact on our fishing sector as a result of Brexit. That was a tremendous concern of the fishing sector and the Government from the outset. That is why we worked so closely together throughout the process to ensure there was one united national voice. The Government and I worked with our counterparts in other European maritime states and the industry representatives worked with their counterparts. This was to ensure that the European approach was strong and resolute and that fishing was a key priority in the negotiations during the initial mandate and throughout the process. Key to this all along was ensuring that fisheries were discussed in terms of the wider trade agreement. That was essential in order to give us the strongest possible platform and to get a good outcome for the sector.

Deputy Mac Lochlainn will know we catch one third of our fish in UK waters. To have lost

that in a no-deal scenario would have had a massive impact on our fishing sector and it would have had a significant impact in relation to displacement of other vessels in our waters. The British negotiating stance was that they wanted to take back 100% the fish caught by EU fleets in their waters. The ultimate outcome was that 25% would be reallocated over the course of five years. The key thing all along was to ensure that this would be tied to other aspects of the trade agreement. That was something we pushed for and ensured was the case at all stages.

In the final analysis, the three outstanding issues in the last couple of weeks, as we all know, were the issues of governance, a level playing field and fish. In terms of time, it was essential to ensure fish would stay tied in the future to other aspects of the trade agreement. There are conditions in there too to continue to ensure, for example, in relation to energy markets, that it stays tied. We would certainly have liked even more leverage but our key objective in everything we did was using that leverage throughout and ensuring that there would be leverage going forward too.

The deal will see a 15% impact on our overall national quota between now and 2026. That is certainly higher than other EU member states will be taking. Germany is similar in terms of the proportion of its fleet but for other nations, it is less, significantly so for some of them. I am certainly not happy with that situation. It is not an outcome I wanted or we fought for. We knew we were the nation that was most endangered from a fisheries point of view because more than any EU member state we share more of our species with the UK. The species that are important to us are the species that are most important to the UK as well and they were coming after them. We were always very much concerned by that.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs, Deputy Simon Coveney, the Taoiseach and I, in all our respective engagements, had very clearly pushed the principle of burden sharing and fair burden sharing in the outcome of the agreement. The outcome is not a fair reflection of burden sharing. It impacts more on our fisheries sector and that is something I have taken up, very strongly, with the Commission. On Tuesday morning I met with the task force chair, Michael Barnier, and the fisheries Commissioner, Virginijus Sinkevicius, and made it very clear that we were not at all happy about the additional burden we are taking. I will be taking every opportunity to try to address that and across Government, that will be a key priority.

We are at one with the fishing sector in the objective of supporting it and emphasising the fact that this outcome does not reflect the principle of burden sharing. I fully understand and am with it in that we want this raw material of fish for our sector which feeds into our processing sector, into jobs and into the wider economy. That is our first objective. We all know how challenging that battle always is at European level because every other country is fighting its corner as well but I certainly will be taking up that battle in every way I can, working alongside the fisheries sector.

**Deputy Michael Collins:** I thank the Chair for accommodating this meeting. It is of huge importance and I will get straight into what I need to say. As far as I am concerned, after listening to fishermen, their unions and leaders, we are facing a massive crisis in fishing. I am in a rural constituency, surrounded by water and fishing, that has seen cuts for the last number of years and neglect by successive governments. I was in the Dáil yesterday but the Minister did not get around to answering some of the questions, which I accept given that our time limits were very tight. The preliminary analysis now confirms that the transfer of quota shares from Ireland is a staggering 27% higher than the Government initially announced. The official report indicates a total loss to Ireland's fishermen in the mackerel sector of €43 million by 2026. This is most valuable to the Irish fleet, which has been hardest hit with a 26% cut in its quota

share, worth €28.6 million. Around 60% of this cut will emerge in 2021 so the impact will be felt immediately. What can the Minister offer fishermen? I have been talking to people in the pelagic sector and they have told me they are facing wipe-out, massive drops in their income and job losses. The only thing they hear from the Government is about a decommissioning and tie-up scheme. Surely, there is something better for the Irish fishermen who see and want to see a future in the water other than a tie-up and a decommissioning scheme. The Minister said he was talking to Michel Barnier during the week and raised with him the situation Irish fishermen were facing with an additional burden. We did not get anywhere in the negotiations. It looks to me Michel Barnier was negotiating. I was always saying in the Dáil that he was offering 18% and asking where the 18% of fish was coming from. I always knew it was coming from Ireland at a cost to Irish fishermen. No one seemed to want to take up the issue. Mr. Barnier's president, Mr. Macron, was definitely at the wheel and was steering the ship. He was not going to allow any deal until French fishermen were looked after. Unfortunately, it seems they and other European countries were looked after at a cost to Irish fishermen.

Where do these fishermen go from here? What is their future? They are losing their income and their jobs. There are going to be massive losses in coastal counties like the Minister's county of Donegal and in my constituency of Cork South-West. What is the future? I do not want to hear about decommissioning because if that is the future for Irish fishermen, it is a very bleak one. I asked the Minister about the number of EU, non-Irish, UK and other coastal state vessels that have authorisation to fish in the biologically sensitive area in the Celtic Sea, off our west coast, in the Irish Sea and off our Donegal coast? I asked the Minister another question yesterday, which he did not have the chance to answer as the time was very tight. How does one monitor the amount of fish these vessels catch every day in Irish waters? The Minister might be able to answer those questions.

**Chairman:** Was the Minister able to hear all that?

**Deputy Charlie McConalogue:** I was.

On the Deputy's point on the total value of the impact of the quota transfer on Ireland, the initial analysis after the agreement was based on EU average prices. That was the assessment the EU had carried out based on EU average prices. The quota share and the total tonnage has been the same from the outset. That has been very clear. A tonne is a tonne. The various impacts on different species have not changed. We carried out our own assessment using Irish prices on the Irish market, extrapolating that in relation to other species as well. No matter which country does it, or what value one would use per tonne, different species would impact the assessment on it. The initial impact was based on EU average prices. That would have been the European Commission assessment. Every country applying its national prices to it would have a different figure. The tonnes remain the same but in our assessment, the best and clearest way for us to do it is to see how it impacts our national prices. If one were to do it based on the EU average prices, the figure discussed immediately after the agreement, €32 million, would have had a 13.4% impact on the overall value from an Irish point of view. When we apply our own prices to it, we would calculate that at €43 million, which would be 15%. Each member state would have different calculations depending on what value it puts on different fish or different species. We used our own.

I refer to my objective throughout the negotiations. As a representative of Donegal, the county most affected by fisheries, I was very much aware of the absolute importance of fisheries, no more than Deputy Collins who represents a county and a constituency which is similarly affected like many of our coastal counties. Our objective, working with the fishing industry,

throughout the negotiating process was not to have any give in terms of fish. That was the line we held to and pushed at all times. As everyone is aware, a no-deal Brexit would have been quite catastrophic from a fisheries perspective. The outcome to the deal is going to have an impact. While the impact will not be on the scale of a no-deal Brexit, it will nonetheless have a significant impact on our fleet compared to some of the other fleets one might look at. My objective and mission at EU level is to fight for fishing every way we can and, while working with our sector on how we can support it, to address what is undoubtedly an impact. There is an impact for all member states with regard to the Common Fisheries Policy. I am moving to set up a task force to ensure the sector and the communities most impacted by the Brexit outcome are central to how we actually support them to grow and to ensure the maximum value for our fisheries sector in the time ahead. This is a fundamental impact. We have all known over the past three to four years how fundamental Brexit could be and how damaging it could be. Thankfully that damage was limited but it could not be entirely avoided. Now we must work to address that to ensure the sector is invested in and prioritised in the time ahead to make the absolute most of the sector and the very valuable resources we have.

**Deputy Thomas Pringle:** I thank the Chairman for the opportunity to participate in the meeting as I am not a member of this committee. I got the document just before the meeting started and have looked through it while the discussion was ongoing. We have had a number of debates on the floor of the Dáil on fishing, yesterday included. This is a very serious situation for the fishing industry. It is debatable how it can survive the actual cuts that are talked about here. It definitely will not survive in its current state. The industry would have to decline significantly to be viable with these cuts.

I am aware that the opening statement is being taken as read. The Minister's opening statement states in the first paragraph that this "means that Ireland's key Brexit objectives have been achieved". Do we take it that fishing was not one of the key objectives? If that is the case, fair enough, but the Government should say that rather than leading the fishing organisations and the fishermen astray in relation to it. Our key Brexit objectives may have been achieved but fishing has been left to one side and left on its own.

The Minister outlined yesterday in the Dáil, and in his opening statement today, a meeting he had with Michel Barnier and the EU fisheries Commissioner in recent days at which the Minister outlined Ireland's disappointment at the outcome of the negotiations. In the Dáil debate yesterday and in today's statement, the Minister has not outlined what their response was. I believe that how the EU has responded to Ireland's concerns would be the most interesting part of it. The reality is that the Minister will have to go back into the Common Fisheries Policy negotiations to try to get, for the first time ever, a fair deal for Ireland. It is clear, from the way the rest of the countries dealt with the Brexit negotiations, that Ireland is being left behind with regard to fairness and equity within the EU, and always has been. The Minister must undo that in the upcoming negotiations. I wish him well and good luck with that because it is vitally important for our communities right along the coast.

In his opening statement the Minister also referred to the task force he intends to establish to look at the future of the fishing industry. I ask that he would consider having representatives of crews, not the vessel owners but the actual crews, and representatives of workers in the fish factories to participate in the task force. Their voices are, to a large extent, lost in this discussion and they are the people who will be immediately impacted in respect of the changes taking place.

**Deputy Charlie McConalogue:** One of our key objectives was to ensure that there would

be a deal which would avoid a hard border in Ireland and protect our national interests across the economy, including fishing. Every part of our economy, peace on our Island and fishing, in particular, were exposed as a result of Brexit. These were all included as key objectives. It was really important that we got a deal, not least from a fisheries point of view in that one third of our fish are caught in UK waters, significant displacement would have resulted from a no-deal and our 1,900 boats would not have been able to access UK waters. The Deputy knows, from a Killybegs point of view, how important that is and the impact it would have had. We always knew that there was a challenge in respect of fully protecting fish. It had been put up in lights as the key objective of the British Government in the negotiations. It was one of the key reasons given to British people during the Brexit campaign that they should vote for Brexit and take back control of the fish in their waters. As we know, throughout the negotiations the British were looking to take back 100% of the fish caught in their waters. The ultimate outcome was that 25% of the fish caught by the EU fleet in their waters would be reallocated and that, in return, mutual reciprocal access for the EU fleet to fish in UK waters would continue.

Many of the stock desired by British fishermen and Scottish fishermen are also desired by us. There are many valuable species, but mackerel and prawn are two of the most important and invaluable species for our fleet. They were the two that the British Government were really going after in the negotiations. We fought tooth and nail to ensure that the line was kept and that we would protect our fishing industry. Unfortunately, in order to achieve a deal, a reallocation of 25% was involved, and we bear the weight of that more disproportionately than other member states.

Looking across the rest of the economy, there is a recognition, as there was at the outset, that apart from Britain, the country most likely to be damaged and suffer from Brexit, was Ireland. This is the case very much in respect of our fishing sector, but also right across our economy. The Brexit adjustment reserve was allocated last week to countries most impacted by Brexit. The fishing industry is an element of that, but only a certain element of it. Ireland got 25% of that total EU fund. That is a reflection of the fact that our country's economy is most impacted by Brexit and that includes our fishing industry. At the European level, my objective is to fight for our fishermen and fisherwomen. That is ultimately what they want. I will also work alongside them in addressing what undoubtedly is the result of Brexit and the impact on our own fleet and those of others. In respect of our own fleet, I will invest, work with and involve them and seek direction on how to best I, as Minister, and the Government, can support them in the time ahead.

**Deputy Thomas Pringle:** The Minister did not answer two of my questions. I wonder if he could answer them.

**Deputy Charlie McConalogue:** What were the other two questions?

**Deputy Thomas Pringle:** I am interested in the meeting the Minister attended with Michel Barnier and the Commissioner and in what they actually said at the meeting, rather than what the Minister said. Will there be representatives of fishermen - as opposed to fishery owners - and factory workers whose livelihoods depend on it on the task force the Minister is establishing in order that their voices will be heard?

**Deputy Charlie McConalogue:** I made the case clearly about the Deputy's first point. I am sure none of us is expecting other member states to be coming forward and offering us their fish. That is a battle and a challenge we will face. I will take every opportunity going forward to try to get a result for our fishermen. As Deputy Pringle knows, having watched fishery ne-

gotiations over the years, that is always challenging. The Government has been clear about the importance of burden-sharing coming out of the fisheries agreement. We wanted that to be reflected in the agreement itself, and if there was a give regarding fish, it should be spread across member states. If the outcome of the negotiations does not address that burden, then we will be in a situation at European level where will be engaging with other member states about the challenge of applying burden-sharing afterwards. That is where matters stand. I have made it clear - and Germany is similar - that we are the member state that has sustained the biggest impact as a result of the reallocation. The EU Agriculture and Fisheries Council will meet on Monday and I will take this matter up again at that meeting. We will take it up at every opportunity in order to try to find constructive ways in which it can be addressed.

I have had discussions with the industry and will be engaging in detail about the task force and its composition. I am open to contributions that members of the committee wish to make for consideration.

**Deputy Paul Kehoe:** I concur with the remarks to the effect that a no-deal Brexit would have been a disaster for our coastal communities. We have been well-warned about the consequences of Brexit. Listening to some contributions, they make it sound simple. The negotiations in recent years by the Minister and his predecessors, Deputies Coveney and Creed, have not been simple.

The Minister mentioned a task force and getting the maximum value out of our fishing industry and coastal communities. I would like him to flesh out what he expects and wants and who will sit on such a task force, and making sure that processors and everybody involved in the fishing industry will be represented on that task force.

A question raised in my coastal community in Wexford is about scallop fishermen who were fishing off the southern coast of the UK. Up until now, they have been allowed to dock and land their scallops in the UK and transport them back to Ireland. Now they can land their boats in the UK but they have to go to UK-based processors. If they do not do so, they cannot land. That would mean they have to go to Belgium or such to get the scallops transported to Ireland. They are asking if there can be a derogation for that, otherwise they will have to steam back to Wexford and to other coastal communities here. What is proposed does not make sense. They are seeking a derogation. They also understand that there are other issues.

**Deputy Charlie McConalogue:** Regarding the task force, it is not just about the value of fish and its impact. It is also a matter of what it means for the processing sector, employment and the spin-off sectors, whether engineering, boat-building, maintenance or the local economy which depends on fishing in coastal areas. It is important that the task force reflects that. I will consider any input from committee members about that. I intend to set up the task force promptly. There is a three-month window to the end of March during which there will be parity in respect of the quotas that can be caught during that time, which is important. That was agreed in December but there is an urgency around this regarding how we support the sector in the time ahead. I want to ensure that the task force plays a key role in informing the way we go forward.

The Government stands ready to support the sector. We understand the impact of what has happened and the challenge to be faced. We are also very much aware of the fact that the sector still has a very strong future but that Brexit has had a real impact on it. We need to consider how we work to support those in the sector to address that in terms of the outcome of the negotiations and engaging at European level on quota discussions but also, domestically, in the

context of how we can best support the industry and the coastal communities that depend on it in the time ahead.

With regard to scallop fishermen, there are real challenges now with regard to landing catches, particularly in Britain. We have seen the tremendous challenges the Scottish fishermen have had, and fishermen across Britain, in exporting their fish and the red tape involved. It is ironic that the British Government is having to come forward with a financial package to support them. That is a very long way from the scenario and horizons that were explained to them during the Brexit negotiations. There are significant challenges now with regard to additional red tape and how vessels land. I will further examine the particular issue the Deputy raised and revert to him on it.

**Deputy Paul Kehoe:** They are willing to seal the trucks and so on. This is about keeping the processing plants open in our coastal communities also. Rather than landing into the UK and having to go to UK processors, we want to do our best to keep processors on our own island in business.

**Senator Tim Lombard:** I thank the Minister for attending. This is a very important meeting because we need information on this major issue. Brexit was always going to have a major impact on the fishing industry. A no-deal scenario would have crippled the industry at every level. This is a bad deal but a no-deal scenario would have crucified us.

Can the Minister elaborate on the timeline he is proposing in the context of getting the task force up and running? Will that require legislation or will it be done by means of a ministerial order? What will be the actual process relating to the establishment of this task force? How will its members be chosen and how it will be funded?

On the significant funding package from Europe, how much does the Minister believe will be made available to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, which is the most affected of all Departments? Where does he see that kind of money being spent? It is a substantial amount of long-term money. What is the Minister's vision for that money in terms of this sector?

**Deputy Charlie McConologue:** I thank Senator Lombard. In the coming days I will be moving to consult with all stakeholders in the sector on the format of and terms of reference relating to the task force. The key objective is to have a full assessment of the impact on those who know best in terms of what the outcome of Brexit means for the sector and to ensure that this informs the way we move forward in terms of both supporting them in the time ahead and the national response. The Government stands ready in terms of the necessity to invest in our fishing sector in the time ahead. The Brexit adjustment reserve is available to provide support in respect of the impact of Brexit across our wider economy, including the fishing sector. I have no doubt, however, that there will be significant additional national funds, particularly for fishing in terms of the impact on that sector. That will be very much informed by the views of those who are affected and who know best how that can be utilised to support the sector in the future. On the Brexit adjustment reserve in general and the agrifood and marine sector, there will be engagement with the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and the Minister for Finance on how it is distributed across the economy. There is a really clear commitment and understanding at Government level on standing ready to support the fisheries sector in the time ahead. That will be very much in addition to what is available in the Brexit adjustment reserve.

**Deputy Michael Ring:** I welcome the Minister and congratulate him. I have not been at a

meeting since he became Minister so I wish him well. He is doing very well.

On the task force, I hope that we would have representatives of the fisheries, not civil servants or people who would be dictating to the fishermen. It must be the people who are involved in the business, such as the processors and the fishermen themselves, who have a big say in it. What will the task force look at? What will it do? Who will distribute the funding from Europe to the fishermen? Will it come directly from Europe to the fishermen or will it come through the Department?

**Deputy Charlie McConalogue:** I thank the Deputy for his good wishes. I agree with him completely on the task force. It is about making sure that those who are impacted or affected and, indeed, who know best about how the sector works and how it can be supported, are particularly supported to address the impact of Brexit and to move on and have a sustainable, successful future. That is what it is about. We must ensure they inform the future direction of the sector and how we go forward with investment in the time ahead.

On the Brexit adjustment reserve, the funding will be allocated at national level for member countries to decide how they are used nationally. There will be significant discussions and engagement within the Government on the overall use of that. Particularly for fisheries, there is a very clear commitment on national funding which will be required to support the sector, which is one of those most impacted.

**Senator Paul Daly:** I thank the Minister for his presentation. While I agree with what he has said in that what is there is better than no deal, it is far from desirable from the perspective of the fishing industry.

Some of my points have already been raised. It seems there is a disproportionate reduction in our quota from the European side. Has due regard been given to what were known as The Hague preferences, where preferential treatment was given to UK and Irish quotas and total allowable catches? There does not seem to have been any regard to The Hague preferences here when the loss of quota was being divvied up. The Irish sector seems to have lost a disproportionate amount of quota. Has that rebalanced the book from the European side? Is our argument here with our colleagues?

**Deputy Charlie McConalogue:** I thank the Senator. As I said previously, the most straightforward way to ensure there was equitable burden sharing was in regard to the deal itself. Of course, we were pushing at all stages for there not to be any move or any fish lost, but if there was to be fish lost or reallocated from the EU fleet to the UK fleet, we wanted that done in a way that spread the pain and the burden across member states. We knew the challenge in that we are the member state that shares the most species with the UK and, given our proximity, the species that are really important to us are really important to them. That was always a big challenge from our point of view and why, right through the negotiations, we pushed that principle of burden sharing.

Unfortunately, the outcome of the agreement does not reflect that and does put more of a burden on Ireland, and it is an issue that I, with European colleagues, will be looking to have addressed. That will undoubtedly be challenging because every member state is massively protective of its fish share, and fish is equally important to fishermen everywhere. However, there is a reality in terms of the fact Brexit has disproportionately impacted our fisheries sector in particular, along with other parts of our economy.

In terms of constructive solutions at European level, I will explore different options, including the Hague principles, to see how that might be addressed. I do not for one second underestimate the challenges but we all have to, and I certainly will, push to make it very clear that the outcome is unfair to us and needs to be addressed.

**Deputy Fergus O'Dowd:** I am grateful for the invitation to attend. I represent a Border constituency like that of Deputy Mac Lochlainn and I am Chairman of a committee Deputy Mac Lochlainn serves on, the Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement. I am here today to show my appreciation of and concern for what is an issue that affects all of our island, even though we have different political administrations, North and South.

I welcome the Minister. The last time I spoke to him it turned out he had Covid but, thankfully, we were both wearing masks at the time and it was on a main street. I wish him well and I wish him success in the work he is doing. We would be very happy to familiarise ourselves, as a committee, with any issue we can articulate and support, and to try to get support, North and South. We all know fish know no borders. We have a border in this country and we must do our very best to alleviate the significant adverse impact Brexit is having on our communities and on our fisheries. I am speaking in that context. The Minister is very welcome to come before our committee at the appropriate time. I know Deputy Mac Lochlainn was anxious to articulate that our committee is extremely concerned and would love to be involved in the appropriate way with any initiatives the Minister may have, or that we could possibly assist in, because we have representatives from other parties that are not represented in our Parliament. There are many people who want to see continued commercial success for the fisheries industry, North and South, if we can manage to hold a line that both parts of the island can support and articulate.

**Chairman:** I ask Deputies Mac Lochlainn and Michael Collins to ask their questions together as we are short on time. I ask them to put a brief question each to the Minister.

**Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn:** I will meet with representatives of the fishing industry in the North of Ireland later today and I know they are concerned that this agreement has pitted fishers on the island against each other. They want to unite across the island with one voice looking for a fair share of the fishing resource all around our island. They do not want to be divided by this agreement. They want to unite. I will feed back to the Minister what they are saying and I urge the Department to engage with the fishing organisations in the North to hear what they have to say. It might be surprised that they have a very different view from the fishers across the water.

The framework of the Common Fisheries Policy has been relative stability, which is based on fishing practices in the 1970s and 1980s. This framework of relative stability has been fundamentally undermined by this trade deal in which the British Government put zonal attachment, whereby the fish would benefit the fishing communities closest to the waters. I argue that the Minister needs to advance this proposition and that Ireland needs to argue for similar treatment.

While we say the British were looking for their waters, we have to be realistic, and I say this in the context of Ireland and Britain. We are exporting into a market of 500 million people in the European Union. Therefore, everybody accepts there has to be compromise in accessing the waters. The problem for Ireland is we have given away far too much of our share of the fish in our waters. We have to rebalance this. This is an opportunity to rebalance the injustice not only of this deal but of deals of the past. This is why we tabled an amendment to the Minister's motion in recent days. We need to unite across all political parties on this island. Every

political party on this island needs to unite and demand that our fishers get a fair share, not an unreasonable share, of the fish in our waters. I ask the Minister to join and unite across the political divide on this objective.

I ask that this allocation of €113 million for our fishing community arising from Brexit be increased substantially and that the fishing industry that Deputy Pringle spoke about, the fishers themselves and the people who work in the factories, be involved in how that money is allocated to our communities. It is so important that the money goes to all of the people impacted by this.

**Deputy Michael Collins:** The Minister is obviously going back out to Europe to see whether he can renegotiate the quotas but in some of the replies to the questions that have been asked he said that in his opinion no country will be offering any of its quota. Those countries have a deal with which some of them are happy enough. They have a far better deal than what we got. In my view, it should be shared equally throughout Europe but, unfortunately, it looks like this will not be the case. If this is the case, we will be left with a situation where we will have massive job losses. Does the Government have ready-made jobs to replace those we will lose from the decommissioning?

**Deputy Charlie McConalogue:** I thank the Chairman and members for their contributions. I welcome Deputy O'Dowd's support as Chairman of the Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement. To touch on Deputy Mac Lochlainn's point, the all-island aspects of this are important. I met the Minister, Mr. Poots, and his team on Tuesday night for a thorough discussion on emerging Brexit issues. It is very important that there is strong engagement and co-operation and this is something I very much value. It is something I have had very strongly with the Minister, Mr. Poots, and the Northern Ireland Executive since I was appointed and it will continue, particularly with regard to the fisheries aspect after Brexit.

Deputy Mac Lochlainn made a point on relative stability and zonal attachment which, of course, was a key argument the British Government made in advance of Brexit and throughout the negotiations, in terms of ensuring its national quota would reflect what is caught in British waters. Taking back their fish and waters was one of the key objectives put to the British people to vote for Brexit in the first place and throughout the negotiations. Despite looking to take back 100% of the fish caught in UK waters, the final arrangement from the negotiations resulted in a 25% allocation over four to five years.

Britain is now outside the European Union and the Common Fisheries Policy but there is still reciprocal access to waters, thankfully, as a result of the trade and co-operation agreement. Thankfully, we managed to hold the 100% ask about the reallocation of fish caught in their waters to 25%. That is still 25% too much in our estimate. It means a 15% impact on our national quota. That pain is a reflection of why we do not want to give any. Despite the UK having left the European Union, there is still that opportunity for ourselves and other EU fishermen to catch fish in UK waters, however.

It is always massively contested at European level. Every country values the quotas they have. There is reality, however, with the Brexit negotiations, our proximity and the number of species we share with Britain. This has resulted in a disproportionate burden on ourselves compared to other EU member states. I will be taking that forward looking for constructive ways to have that addressed with the objective of making sure that we prioritise quota share for Irish fishermen.

That is a battle we will be having. We know there will be an impact and a readjustment as a result of Brexit. That is the key rationale behind moving to set up the task force. It will use the experience, understanding and insight from coastal communities and those involved in various aspects of the sector. That will very much inform how we can address investing in coastal communities and in the fishing sector in the time ahead.

**Chairman:** On behalf of the committee, I thank the Minister for engaging constructively with the committee on the topic of Brexit and its impact on fisheries. This is hugely problematic for the industry. There will be ongoing engagement between the committee and the Minister as we try to get some kind of reasonable outcome for our fisheries and ensure our fishing industry survives.

*Sitting suspended at 10.58 a.m. and resumed at 11.03 a.m.*

**Chairman:** For our second session on the impact of Brexit on the fisheries industry, I welcome from the Irish South and West Fish Producers Organisation, Mr. Patrick Murphy, chief executive officer, and Mr. John Lynch, chairman; from the Killybegs Fishermen's Organisation, Mr. Seán O'Donoghue, chief executive officer; and from the Irish Fish Producers Organisation, Mr. John Ward, chief executive officer.

On behalf of the committee, I express sincere condolences to the family, friends and colleagues of Mr. Hugo Boyle, chief executive officer of the Irish South and East Fish Producers Organisation, who passed away this week. Mr. Boyle worked tirelessly on behalf of the fisheries industry and made frequent and valuable contributions to this committee. I propose that we hold a minute's silence in his memory. Is that agreed? Agreed. *Members rose.*

**Chairman:** May he rest in peace. I will read a notice with regard to parliamentary privilege. Witnesses are protected by absolute privilege in respect of their evidence to the committee. However, if they are directed by the Chair to cease giving evidence on a particular matter and they continue to so do, they are entitled thereafter only to a qualified privilege in respect of their evidence. They are directed that only evidence connected with the subject matter of these proceedings is to be given and they are asked to respect the parliamentary practice to the effect that, where possible, they should not criticise or make charges against any person or entity by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable.

Participants in the committee meeting from a location outside the parliamentary precincts are asked to note that the constitutional protections afforded to those participating from within the parliamentary precincts do not extend to them. No clear guidance can be given on whether or the extent to which their participation is covered by absolute privilege of a statutory nature.

We have received the opening statements, which have been circulated to members. We are limited in our time due to Covid-19 safety restrictions. The committee has agreed that the opening statements be taken as read so we can use the full session for questions and answers. I now invite questions from the members. I call Deputy Kehoe.

**Deputy Paul Kehoe:** I thank the Chairman very much. I am not sure if the witnesses were listening to the Minister but I presume they were. I would like to hear their thoughts on the task force the Minister is proposing to set up and what they, as organisations, would like to see from it.

Regarding my constituency of Wexford, I also raised the issue relating scallops and the landing of boats in the UK. From 1 April, they will be prohibited from landing their catch in

the UK and transporting it back to Ireland for processing. The third issue is that of processors in Ireland and the result of the Brexit negotiation on quotas. I would like to get the witnesses' comments on the future of the processing industry in Ireland.

**Mr. Seán O'Donoghue:** I thank the Chairman very much for the opportunity to be present. I would like to reiterate what he said about a good friend and colleague in Hugo Boyle. I thank him for doing that. He was a good friend and colleague to all of us.

In terms of the question that was asked about the task force, we obviously welcome it but there are two things I am concerned about. The first is that it could become a talking shop and the second is that it could delay us from the immediate action we could take here. I did not hear all of the Minister's presentation but, as I see it, we need to take up the burden-sharing immediately. That cannot mean waiting for a task force to make such decisions. The task force should examine matters such as those Deputy Mac Lochlainn outlined to the Minister, namely, the issues with relative stability and the Common Fisheries Policy, CFP, review. I think they would be long-term issues rather than short-term ones. When I talk about the short term, I am talking about addressing the burden-sharing in the next two months rather than next year.

I will leave the questions on scallops and processors to my colleagues in the IS&EFPO, given that we are not directly involved in the scallop fishery. I hope I have answered the Deputy's question on the task force.

**Chairman:** Does Mr. Lynch wish to respond to Deputy Kehoe's question on scallops?

**Mr. John Lynch:** I thank the Chairman for the invitation and for the tribute he paid to our colleague Hugo Boyle. It was much appreciated. Deputy Kehoe's question to the Minister in regard to scallops is very relevant to our organisation. All seven of the Irish scallop boats are our members. I have asked a similar question of the Department and am awaiting an answer. The issue is that from 31 March, our scallop vessels will not be able to land in the UK, as they currently do when they are fishing in the Channel. It is too far to come back to Ireland and the cost of getting the product back from France to Wexford to be processed would be double the cost that it is now when doing so from the UK. I believe that to land in the UK after 31 March, scallops would need a health certificate for onward transportation. To my knowledge, the product would have to go through a processor in the UK to achieve this and testing would have to be done on the scallops before they could be exported from a third country back to the EU. What was being asked for was some form of derogation or system whereby the truck could be sealed in the UK and not opened until it reached the factory in Ireland.

**Deputy Michael Collins:** I welcome our guests from the fishing organisations in various parts of the country. No one knows more than they do the catastrophic crisis the industry faces. The issue greatly affects my constituency, so I welcome their contributions to the meeting.

The Minister stated when the deal was done that it was a fair one. I was astonished when I heard that. He stated that there would be losses of €34 million, but it now transpires that the losses could be anything up to €43 million. Our guests might comment on that.

I asked the Minister the following question but he did not give a clear answer. Has the Government given any indication to our guests' organisations whether it has any ready-made jobs to replace the ones we are guaranteed to lose? There has been much talk about the task force, and task forces are fine and great, but the crisis is here and now. Approximately 60% of the cuts will emerge in 2021, so the impact will be felt immediately. No matter how good the task force

is, it will not resolve the crisis that we face now. Mr. Murphy of the ISWFPO might be able to answer some of those questions. Is tourism our way out? Is that what the Government has in mind to replace these jobs? What is the indication from the Department, if any?

**Mr. Patrick Murphy:** I thank the Chairman for the opportunity to appear before the committee. We appreciate the acknowledgement of the loss of our colleague and friend, Hugo Boyle. The acknowledgement and the minute of silence the committee gave were much appreciated.

I will start with a bit of information on scallops and why this is a problem. Scallops digest and filter water and in that water there is plankton. Sometimes that plankton creates a toxin in the gut of the fish. Normally they are tested to see that they are within the proper parameters so they can be moved and shipped. For that to happen, those vessels would, as Mr. Lynch said, have to be processed in the UK and only the meat sent back. The processing would be done over there so the solution would be a derogation for those fish to be tested before being processed here. They would be sealed in closed lorries and sent back for processing. That would resolve the problem there, keep jobs and help those boats to be viable in their costings.

On the question of the task force, we welcome that and any engagement whatsoever, particularly with the knowledge base we can see that we all share. We come from different parts of the industry. I cover a number of them so I hope I will be able to contribute to developing something that would mitigate the damage. I agree with my colleague, Mr. O'Donoghue, that this is an immediate threat. We are going to lose fish. We have already lost fish at the start of this year, and each month we sit together and try to share out what we have between our vessels. It is hugely complicated by the landing obligation. If we catch the lowest denominator of fish, it means we cannot catch the rest of the fish because we would be engaged in illegal, unreported and unregulated, IUU, fishing. With opportunities being narrowed, it has a huge effect on us trying to earn a living.

We will look into the task force but I think Mr. O'Donoghue has articulated what we need. We need a correct and proper share-out of the burden. We have to understand this burden is not just the loss of fishing from our industry that our boats lose. It is also the fish that we have to pay from our waters. It is hard to explain to the fishermen that they have to leave the jobs that are there not because there are no fish there but because we are giving the fish to somebody else. The reason we are giving it to somebody else is that they have claimed more fish under zonal attachment, and that zonal attachment means that because fish are in one's waters, one gets more fish. It is a contradiction in terms and it is hard for our industry to be told that perhaps a quarter of those working in the industry will have to leave and, not only that, but future generations will not be able to enter the industry either.

The positive side is that we asked for the setting up of a task force with immediate effect. We have to know what the next measures to be taken are and we cannot wait, as Mr. O'Donoghue said. It has to be immediate because the effects are immediate. We know that from this month's quota for monkfish. We are already looking for swaps from foreign countries to keep our boats fishing in areas.

**Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn:** I thank the four industry leaders who are in on the call representing their producer organisations today. I join the Cathaoirleach in extending sympathy to the family and friends of Hugo Boyle. I had the privilege of meeting Hugo on a number of occasions and speaking to him on many occasions. He was a thoroughly decent man and a genuine person for uniting the industry to stand together and stand up for their interests. He

will be badly missed. I am proud that he was a Donegal man. I am sure he will be thinking of us and will be with us in spirit for the next big fight we have to make.

I made the appeal earlier to the Minister, Deputy McConalogue. I have been speaking to all facets of the fishing industry in Ireland: the producer organisation leaders, the inshore sector, the island sector and all the people across the island. I will meet with leaders of the fishing industry in the North of Ireland today. My appeal is that we unite across all political parties and all sectors of fisheries to defend our interests right now. We have accepted reluctantly the relative stability model for many years. The approach of the British Government in its trade negotiations was for zonal attachment. Truth be told, it never believed in a million years that it would get what it said it wanted because it is exporting to a market of 500 million people. In the presentations made by Mr. Murphy and Mr. O'Donoghue to the committee before the deal was done, it was pointed out that approximately 74% of British fishing produce is exported to the EU. Of course, the British was never going to get what it specified but it has got acceptance of the principle of zonal attachment, which is a game changer. We now need to build on that. I agree with Mr. O'Donoghue's comment that in the short or immediate term, we need to fight for burden sharing. The submission is spot on in that regard. We need to secure burden sharing immediately in the negotiations in the days, weeks and months ahead. We must also agree together that the practice of relative stability, which bases the share of fish in Irish waters that we get on the fishing practices of the 1970s, makes no sense anymore. We are not looking for all the fish in our seas. We are aware that we have to export to the EU, with its population of 500 million, but we are looking for a fair share that allows sustainable living for all our fishermen. I ask all the IFPO leaders to give me their thoughts on the call to unite together across the island of Ireland, the industry and all political parties. Hopefully the task force can be part of that. I refer to making a united call regarding what we want from the immense marine resource around our island.

This is the only remaining island state in the EU. It is the only island state in the EU surrounded entirely by water. We have a Minister responsible for agriculture, food and the marine and two Ministers of State but neither of the Ministers of State has responsibility for the marine. That is the situation we are in. We do not have a focus and we have taken our eye off the ball. That is how we allowed this situation to arise. There is no point crying over spilt milk, however. We have to talk about how we move forward. Do the witnesses agree that we all need to unite and ask for a different approach in the Common Fisheries Policy than that of relative stability, which has failed us over the years?

**Chairman:** I will only allow Mr. Ward to respond because a number of members want to ask questions. I want to use our time as fairly as I can.

**Mr. John Ward:** I echo the kind words about our late colleague, Hugo Boyle.

I agree wholeheartedly with what the Deputy said. As far as the producer organisations are concerned, we have no problem at all regarding the request. We are united in trying to do something about this terrible Brexit deal that was given to us. I would go a little further than the Deputy in that the real problem we have is that we are very much the junior partner in a very large Department. Unfortunately, the agriculture element of the Department is very sizeable and very important to the country. While the marine is at the coat-tails of agriculture, we will never get the representation that we require.

**Deputy Matt Carthy:** I thank our guests and apologise for missing the first session. I had another meeting and it ran on.

Without repeating what has been said, I contend Irish fisheries have been the poor relation in our relationship with the EU for too long. The core problem, as Deputy Mac Lochlainn said, is the notion of relative stability. It has been a burden that no Government has seriously tried to address. I mean no disrespect to the Minister but his efforts in engaging with his fellow ministers at that level will not result in the type of sea change, or even shorter-term burden sharing, that is required. No other fisheries minister in Europe has an interest in or anything to be gained from trying to ensure a deal or change of that nature. Therefore, the approach needs to be Government-led and across all Departments when we engage with the EU.

If we seek fundamental reform of the Common Fisheries Policy in isolation, the answer will be “No”. We must tie it in with other concerns, as other member states do on other matters all the time. We could say, for example, that we will not support any further EU treaty change unless the policy is also reviewed and reformed. We could indicate that we will not agree to other major fundamental reforms being pushed by the EU unless this also becomes part of the conversation. We have seen during the Brexit negotiations that for an Irish priority to become a European priority, it must be led by the Government.

This is not to say the Department does not have a fundamental role. I welcome Mr. Ward’s response to Deputy Mac Lochlainn but do the other speakers agree with our analysis that there is a need for a Minister with responsibility for fisheries to ensure the approach I speak about can be prioritised within our Government in the first instance? I deal with the Department all the time and it is clear fisheries and the marine are the poor relation. Part of the problem undoubtedly arises because for a long period we have not had political leadership prioritising fisheries in the Department. I am interested in hearing the views of the witnesses on such matters. I thank them again for taking the time to attend this morning.

**Mr. Seán O’Donoghue:** I thank the Deputy for his comments. I fully agree that we need a full approach across all sectors with everybody pushing together. I do not want to be side-tracked from the immediate position, however. We have a very bad fisheries deal that is hitting us here and now. We need action. I do not need sympathy from the Government or Ministers; I need action.

The burden sharing can be achieved and there is precedent for doing it. It was done between 1976 and 1983 when we were setting out the relative stability keys that we have been talking about. These are quota shares, to put it in layman’s terms. It is forgotten that the UK benefited hugely at that time, getting an extra 90,000 tonnes of fish that it held right up until the trade negotiations. We fought tooth and nail that it should have been taken from the British but they managed to keep that allocation as well. It is valued at €80 million. I have said that the value transferred by the EU to the UK is €182 million but we should add another €80 million because the UK held on to those extra quotas.

This was done through “equalisation” and that 90,000 tonnes of fish came from other member states. We need to sit down with colleagues immediately and indicate that Ireland has been hit disproportionately by this. We have done a very detailed analysis of the 124 stocks that are part of the trade agreement. We can show exactly what member states got hit the worst and there is no doubt but that Ireland is greatly disproportionately hit than the other member states. I note that the Minister mentioned that Germany is in a similar position to us. Germany is not in a similar position because we got hit on our two main species to the tune of €26 million on mackerel and €7 million on prawns. As I have done the analysis, I can show that no other member state got hit like that and we need to address the matter.

As Deputies Carthy and Mac Lochlainn mentioned, back in the 1970s we had the Hague preferences that addressed the inequity in burden sharing and relative stability. I stress to this committee that we need action now. As the decommissioning of vessels and communities is unacceptable, together we must move might and main to ensure that will not happen.

**Deputy Thomas Pringle:** I, too, extend my sympathies following the death of Mr. Hugo Boyle.

In terms of the discussion so far, I caution against the establishment of a Department of the marine. We had one for many years although it might only have had a junior Minister. The reality is that there is no political responsibility so having a Department will not make a difference because Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael have never put fishing at the heart of their demands. If we had political responsibility then it would not matter whether we had a specific Department.

Three times the Minister has refused to answer what actual deal he had. He said that he had discussions and meetings with Mr. Barnier and the EU fisheries Commissioner where he outlined Ireland's concerns about the deal. The Minister did not outline any of their responses on three separate occasions, which is telling. Much was made at the June Brexit negotiations that our fishery organisations had tied in with the fishery organisations of the six member states to campaign on fisheries. What response did the Minister and his colleagues in member states to the fisheries deal that Ireland got? If we know that then it might give us some indication of the best way to move forward from here.

**Chairman:** Which of the producer representatives want to respond?

**Mr. Seán O'Donoghue:** It probably falls on me to reply, given that we were part of the European Fishing Alliance. A core principle of the alliance is that no member state or fleet segment should be disproportionately affected. On 19 December, we sent that clear message to the European Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, and we have since sent it to the European Parliament. My colleagues in the European Fishing Alliance have accepted the principle. I expect that our Government will rigorously pursue the disproportionality because there is an immediate need. I think I have answered the Deputy's question on what their views have been on this matter.

**Deputy Thomas Pringle:** Regulatory pursuance after the event is not much good.

**Senator Paul Daly:** I would also like to be associated with the Chairman's expressions of sympathy to the family of Mr. Hugo Boyle.

At the last meeting, I asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine about the Hague preferences and I would like the witnesses to elaborate on how that can be utilised on the European side. It was initially set up to give the Irish and the UK a degree of preferential treatment in the context of quotas and total allowable catches, TACs. In the context of the UK's departure from the EU, do the witnesses believe the Hague preferences have been utilised to the fullest extent possible by the Irish fishing industry?

I fully agree with Deputy Mac Lochlainn on the importance of approaching this with a completely united front, North and South. I am a bit taken aback that since Deputy Mac Lochlainn's contribution, we have seen what is a very serious and important issue being turned into a political football. There is no future in that. We need to act collectively here, as a united front, to get the best results for our fishing industry.

**Mr. Patrick Murphy:** Mr. Seán O'Donoghue has set out very clearly the approach that we need to adopt if we are going to undo what is a devastatingly bad deal for our country. The Hague preferences were designed to mitigate the damage to coastal communities when quotas were cut. If cuts were to be made to ensure the sustainability of stocks, the burden of those cuts would be mitigated or lessened for the country in whose waters the fish were located. That was an acknowledgement that, as I said earlier, the fish are in Irish and UK waters. If one looks at maps of Irish and British waters, one can see the continental shelf, which is one of the reasons we have so many visiting fishing fleets in our waters. They come here because the fish are here. Again, it is hard to tell my fishermen and members that not only are they giving up fish but the fish in our waters are being used to pay the bill for other countries. That is an added stress that we have to endure.

Deputy Michael Collins asked a very relevant question earlier. If this deal goes ahead as we fear, it will lead to job losses. We cannot have a fishing industry that does not have enough fish to catch. The regulations will force us to engage in illegal, unreported and unregulated, IUU, fishing. It is difficult enough with the small quotas that we have to keep the fleet going. I remind members that in 2006, we had 280 vessels over 18 m in our demersal fleet but now there are only 164 such vessels on the register. How many of those boats will have to be sacrificed? Those boats represent jobs, real lives and real communities and that fact keeps getting lost in the discussion. A sum of €43 million might not seem like a lot of money in the greater scheme of things but as Mr. O'Donoghue said, it will mean the shutting down of coastal communities. It will mean the loss of jobs and the closure of factories. The herring industry has already been decimated. We have given up all but 1% of Irish Sea herring to the UK. Nobody else was sharing that fish stock. That is what we gave up.

I wish to return to a point made by Deputy Pringle earlier. Most of the vessel owners I represent are also operators and crew members. We represent all of the different segments of the industry. I started off in the inshore segment but have a different role now as CEO of the Irish South and West Fish Producers Organisation. We have inshore members as well and as part of the task force will be representing a multitude of other stakeholders in the industry. We will be representing people like my father, for example, who operates an angling boat and a ferry service. We have everybody's interests at heart. We represent the coastal communities of Ireland, not just the fishing sector because we are all linked together. Many fishermen do not earn enough from the inshore industry and have to do other jobs like small farming and so forth. We are all linked together and are all in this together. This deal will devastate coastal communities. Mr. Seán O'Donoghue must be listened to and we must act immediately. We are asking the committee to pursue the ideas and the strategies Mr. O'Donoghue has clearly outlined. This is not new territory; it has been done before. We are begging your good selves at this stage to follow on from this. It is not just today. It starts today, I hope, and we move on from there.

**Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn:** I recall the presentations the witnesses made as part of this committee's work in assessing the impact of Brexit on our agriculture, food and marine sectors. I remember very well the stark warnings they gave. I also remember the presentation they made in recent months, and here we are today.

I want to talk about the task force. Mr. O'Donoghue is right that we have to get to get down to business immediately and deal with the various crises, but we also have to plot a future for the industry. We will need to have a united voice in that regard. We have to agree what our call will be. When we go to the European Union, what is it that we want from our Government? What approach do we want to the Common Fisheries Policy? All those issues have to

be dealt with by the task force. I have heard reference to the figure for financial compensation. This committee should reject any proposals on decommissioning, but financial supports will be required in the short term to deal with the impact. I was speaking to the Foyle Fishermen's Co-operative Society in Donegal yesterday and in recent days and the impact of this on them is up to one third of their income. They have just invested €3 million in their new building on the harbourside in Greencastle. The repayments on that will not be sustainable if they are to lose one third of their income. That is the scale of the immediate crisis.

We have obtained over €1 billion as part of the Brexit fund. My understanding is that only €113 million of this money is for the fishing sector. Do the witnesses agree that we need a much bigger share of that €1 billion for the sector? Do they also agree that the task force needs to reach agreement on how we will get that to those who are most in need? There is nobody better placed than the witnesses, as representative of the entire industry, to understand that. Third, should that task force outline with a united voice from the fishing industry a direction to all of us in politics what it is they want and what it is we need to do for them to fight for them? Do the witnesses agree with those three points?

**Chairman:** Who wants to take those questions?

**Mr. Seán O'Donoghue:** I do not mind taking them. Deputy Mac Lochlainn is absolutely correct, but I really want to emphasise that our first priority - and we are united in the industry - is to put this in simple terms. We need to get back our fish that we unfairly lost in the trade deal. We cannot get that off the UK now so it has to come from the other member states. The Deputy is quite correct: after that, a financial package will be done. I can tell the committee that the hundred-and-whatever million is just peanuts. It is an irrelevancy in trying to tackle the issue. I am sure the Commission will try to say, "We will give you a few more extra euro and that will solve the problem." It will not because we are not prepared to accept that we need to downsize our industries or indeed our communities. I fully agree that the task force needs to have a very clear vision as to how we will achieve what we need to achieve in redressing the imbalance. It has to be based on fact rather than fiction. The equalisation, the Hague preferences and the third-country negotiations all need to come into the mix. This is where a task force - if it is worth its salt - will put very concrete things together. I assure the committee - and I meet my other three colleagues regularly - that we have a united front in terms of this and we agree with the committee on it. I am very concerned that a task force might end up being a talking shop. We cannot have that. That message must go out very clearly to everybody. The committee is right. If, at a second level after getting our fish back, there is a significant financial package as such, this is where the task force can come in and say "This is the way it should be done". We have bitter experience in terms of the useless tie-up scheme we got in respect of Covid. If that is the road we are going down, I do not want any hand, act or part in it.

**Deputy Michael Collins:** As far as I know, and I stand to be corrected, the four organisations have met since this bad deal was signed up to. They met with the Taoiseach and the Minister. Did the Taoiseach give them any indication as to his view on how the unfortunate situation with which they are faced can be turned around? Are there any ready-made jobs in rural communities that are guaranteed to lose the jobs? Has the Taoiseach told the organisations that he is guaranteed to win the battle regarding burden sharing with other EU countries? I hope the conversation did not work its way around to decommissioning. Could the witnesses tell me the outcome of the meeting with the Taoiseach?

**Chairman:** Which of the producer organisations wishes to answer that?

**Mr. Seán O'Donoghue:** Given that I was instrumental in organising the meeting, I would-----

**Chairman:** We seem to have lost Mr. O'Donoghue.

**Mr. Seán O'Donoghue:** Can the committee hear me?

**Chairman:** We can.

**Mr. Seán O'Donoghue:** There was no mention of decommissioning at that meeting with the Taoiseach and the Ministers for Foreign Affairs and Agriculture, Food and the Marine. We left the Taoiseach in no doubt that we need to get our fish back. We are not just saying that today. We made it clear to him on 28 December. My colleagues can confirm that he gave us a commitment that it would not be our first and last meeting and that he would work with us. We called it a really bad deal. The Taoiseach did not put it in those terms but he recognised that there is a significant problem for our industry and gave us a commitment that he would work with us to address this. I was of the impression, and if I am listening to what the Minister has said prior to this, I believe they have been making interventions in terms of burden sharing. It needs to be upped a notch. We really need to bring this to a level whereby the EU will begin to understand that unless it is addressed come hell or high water, there will be significant consequences in terms of going forward with relative stability keys.

**Chairman:** Do any of the producer representatives want to say anything on that issue?

**Mr. Patrick Murphy:** I want to give the committee a clear indication of what we are being told and the human element involved. I have neighbours and friends from Germany who sent me their version of an article in a German newspaper that asked why the Irish are complaining about this. The author stated that all the fish are in Ireland's waters and asked why the Irish do not simply go and catch them. He questioned whether we were not good fishermen. That is the understanding by the ordinary common person in Europe about this. They know the fish are here. It makes no sense to Europeans why we are in the situation we are in. They simply do not understand it. They maintain that the fish are here and simply ask why we do not go and catch them.

We have to set this right and the only place that can be done is at the top. We need our leaders to go to Europe and explain to people there and show them what is clearly evident, namely, that a bad deal was foisted upon us. Deputy Pringle asked who was present when this was being negotiated, who signed off on it, what are the details of the deal and what are the responses. This will not be solved here, but it can be started here, as Mr. O'Donoghue has said. We need support to do that.

I reiterate that 25% of our fish have been lost. To me, it is a question of simple mathematics: 25% of our industry has to go. Can committee members imagine pointing to one in four people in coastal communities and saying to them that their jobs are gone? I reiterate that it is not because the stocks are in poor condition or because the fish are not in our waters, it is because we had to give them away for the benefit of others. I cannot allow my brain to process this information. How can the European Union turn to any country and tell its people that the policies were meant to protect the coastal communities? They were enshrined in the legislation to protect the coastal communities. Now, it is a case of deciding they will take our fish and try to mitigate the problem by putting coastal communities and their future generations out to pasture. It beggars belief. I thank the Chairman for allowing my intervention.

**Chairman:** Mr. Murphy got his message across loud and clear.

As I said at the outset, we are restricted by Covid-19. I will close this session. On behalf of the committee, I thank the representatives of the Irish Fish Producers Organisation, the Killybegs Fishermen's Organisation, the Irish South and West Fish Producers Organisation and the Irish South and East Fish Producers Organisation for engaging with us on this important issue. On behalf of the committee, I wish to say that our door is open to the fisheries industry for those involved to make their points to us.

We had the Minister before the committee earlier this morning. I am from an inland county but it is clear that the issues facing the fisheries industry are grave indeed. In his final contribution, Mr. Murphy referred to 25% of the fish being lost. That will have a major economic effect on the whole fisheries industry. We have to get a resolution that will allow our boats to stay in Irish waters and allow our fishermen and their families to earn a living.

My thanks to the witnesses for their contributions. The door of this committee is open to the fisheries industry to come here. The Minister announced that he is setting up a task force. The representatives of the organisations should not hesitate to contact us if they think there is any issue we should be focusing on for them. I know the members of the committee will keep fisheries to the forefront of our agenda.

**Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn:** I thank the Chairman.

**Mr. Patrick Murphy:** My thanks to all the Deputies and Senators for their contributions. We look forward to working with them in future, because we have to.

**Chairman:** I propose that we meet again on 26 January 2021 at 4 p.m. via MS Teams. Is that agreed? Agreed.

The joint committee adjourned at until 11.55 a.m. until 4 p.m. on Tuesday, 26 January 2021.