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**Joint Committee on Agriculture, Food and the Marine**

**Political Contribution on COM (2014) 670: Proposal for a Council Regulation fixing for 2015 the fishing opportunities for certain fish stocks and groups of fish stocks, applicable in Union waters and, for Union vessels, in certain non-Union waters and repealing Council Regulation (EU) No 779/2014**

**December 2014**

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**An Comhchoiste um Thalmhaíocht, Bia agus Muir**

**An Cion Polaitiúil maidir le COM (2014) 670: Togra le haghaidh Rialachán ón gComhairle lena socraítear na deiseanna iascaireachta don bhliain 2015 le haghaidh stoic éisc áirithe agus le haghaidh grúpaí áirithe de stoic éisc is infheidhme in uiscí an Aontais agus, do shoithí an Aontais, in uiscí áirithe neamh-Aontais agus lena n-aisghairtear Rialachán (AE) Uimh. 779/2014 ón gComhairle**

**Nollaig 2014**

## **Joint Committee on Agriculture, Food and the Marine**

### **COM (2014) 670: Proposal for a Council Regulation fixing for 2015 the fishing opportunities for certain fish stocks and groups of fish stocks, applicable in Union waters and, for Union vessels, in certain non-Union waters and repealing Council Regulation (EU) No 779/2014**

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#### **Background**

The Oireachtas Joint Committee on Agriculture, Food and the Marine (the Committee) has considered the European Commission's proposal regarding the fixing for 2015 the fishing opportunities for certain fish stocks and groups of fish stocks, applicable in union waters and, for union vessels, in certain non-union waters and repealing Council Regulation (EU) No 779/2014.

In advance of the Council meeting scheduled to take place on 15-16 December 2014, the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine met with stakeholders on 26 November 2014 before briefing the Joint Committee for Agriculture, Food on 2 December 2014.

#### **Implications for Ireland**

The Committee notes that the proposal has significant negative implications for most of the stocks of interest to Irish fishermen with significant quota reductions proposed. Of the approximately 40 stocks of interest to Ireland, two are seeing increases in quota (haddock in Area VIb up by 114% and monkfish in Area V1 up by 20%) with most other stocks seeing significant cuts in the amount available for Irish fishermen. Some of the proposed cuts include:

- cod in Area VIIb-c, e-k, drops by 64%
- haddock in Areas VIIb-k is reduced by 41%
- nephrop in Area VII is down by 14%
- boarfish sees a 58% cut
- herring in Area VIa has a 0 TAC set
- herring in Areas VIIg-k is down by 30%

In addition to the direct losses to the fleet which would result from the proposed cuts, income would also be lost to the processing sector as a direct result of reduced catches, and in a number of ancillary industries (net making, chandlery, engineering, refrigeration etc).

The Committee notes that a Coastal States agreement has been finalised for mackerel, giving a quota for Irish fishermen for 2015 of just over 89,000 tonnes. With the exception of the 2014 quota, the figure agreed for 2015 is the highest mackerel quota available to Irish fishermen for very many years.

The Committee is aware that the EU Commission has not proposed TACs and quotas for some stocks of particular interest to Ireland - for example blue whiting and atlanto scandian herring - have not been specified and are listed as "pro memoria" (pm) in the proposal pending conclusion of the Coastal States negotiations and/or EU-Norway negotiations. The International Fisheries Agreement was agreed following a week of negotiations starting on December 1<sup>st</sup> 2014 between the EU and Norway and the Committee welcomes the outcome of this, which will result in a 12% increase in haddock catches off the Donegal coast. Additionally, the amount of Blue Whiting which will be fishable by Norwegian fisherman has been reduced, which will also benefit Ireland.

Following its deliberations, the Committee has prepared this contribution which seeks to address the key issues and asks that the Commission take into account the views and positions set out in this contribution as part of the negotiations.

### **Economic and Social Impact**

1. The Committee is concerned that the reduction in herring quotas will have a negative impact on Irish coastal communities. Of particular concern is the effect this will have on smaller fishing vessels. The Committee would like to see surpluses of herring quotas to be ring-fenced for smaller fishing enterprises to alleviate this.
2. The Committee is concerned at the potential job losses which could occur as a result of the proposal. These job losses could run into the hundreds as a result of a loss of fishing related revenue of around €70m. A figure of around 500 potential job losses has been cited by a Sea Fisheries Sustainability Impact Assessment.
3. The Committee notes the social and economic impact on coastal communities around Ireland would be extremely adverse should the proposals be adopted.

### **Scientific Evidence**

4. The Committee is eager for the latest scientific advice from the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) and the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) to be applied when quotas are being fixed. However, the Committee would like to see this scientific advice applied in the correct and appropriate manner, with not an overly narrow interpretation of the advice being adopted. This would allow for the appropriate and sustainable level of catches to be fixed on the basis of the evidence available.
5. The Committee points out that data from ICES showing improved stocks is not properly reflected with a corresponding increase in catch quotas for haddock and cod in the Celtic Sea. Similarly, the Committee believes that figures put forward by ICES for skate, ray, and monkfish are not adequately reflected in the Commission's proposed quotas for these fish. No policy reasons have been advanced for these discrepancies.
6. Significant funds have been spent by the Irish Department of Agriculture, Food, and the Marine on data collection, and the Committee is keen for this data to be taken into account during negotiations so that all available data is taken into account during negotiations, and that coastal regions in Ireland are not disproportionately affected by catch limits.

### **Discards**

7. The Committee would like to see the discard plan applied by the Commission equally across all member states and that agreement on discards be legally binding.
8. The proposed discards band is viewed as problematic by the Committee, particularly in the whitefish and demersal fish sectors.

### **Sustainability**

9. The Committee welcomes the increased investment through the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) and is keen to see more information from this investment on individual fisheries.

- 10.** The Committee is fundamentally opposed to the precautionary principle adopted by the Commission will result in a 20% reduction in the quotas for certain data-limited stocks. This precautionary approach, which lacks corresponding scientific data, unfairly punishes fishermen.
- 11.** The Committee would like to see the Commission work with the industry to achieve sustainable fishing models. It notes that the implementation of drastic cuts to quotas in the absence of supporting scientific data is counterproductive.
- 12.** The Committee highlights the fact that Ireland is committed to the CFP reforms but feels that a more gradual approach is needed to sustain the industry and employment in the sector in Ireland into the future.

The Joint Committee wishes for its views to be taken into account and looks forward to the response to its observations from the European Commission.



A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Andrew Doyle', is written over a light blue horizontal line.

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Andrew Doyle T.D.

Chairman

Joint Committee on Agriculture, Food, and the Marine

10th December 2014