

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

*Brussels, 16.2.2016
C(2016) 936 final*

Dear Chair,

The Commission would like to thank the Houses of the Oireachtas for their Opinion concerning the Proposal for a Council Regulation fixing for 2016 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 {COM(2015) 559 final}.

The Commission's aim and one of the pillars of the EU's reformed Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) is to have all stocks fished at sustainable levels by 2020 at the latest. The Commission recognises that achieving maximum sustainable yield (MSY) by 2020 is not without its challenges and that its initial proposal, which was based as in earlier years on the best scientific advice available, contained some significant reductions in total allowable catches (TAC), including cuts for a number of stocks of importance to Ireland.

The discussions at the December Council however have in many cases resulted in the adoption by Member States of TACs that mean smaller cuts than those set out in the Commission's initial proposal, precisely because the socio-economic considerations to which the Houses of the Oireachtas' Opinion refer, have been taken into account. The Commission believes that the final outcome of the Council negotiations on the Commission's proposal for fishing opportunities for the Atlantic for 2016 reflects a responsible decision by Council that takes into account the science behind the Commission's proposal and is in line with the reformed CFP.

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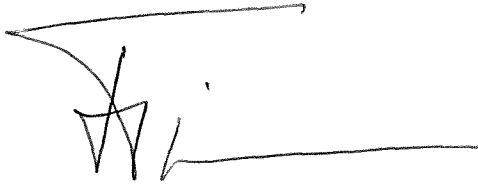
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The Commission has noted the proposals for additional measures contained in the Opinion and would like to refer the Houses of the Oireachtas to the attached annex for a more detailed response to those suggestions.

The Commission hopes that the clarifications provided in this reply address the issues raised by the Houses of the Oireachtas and looks forward to continuing the political dialogue in the future.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'F' followed by a horizontal line extending to the right.

*Frans Timmermans
First Vice-President*

A handwritten signature in black ink, featuring a series of loops and a long horizontal stroke at the bottom.

*Karmenu Vella
Member of the Commission*

ANNEX

The Commission has carefully considered each of the issues raised by the Houses of the Oireachtas in their Opinion and is pleased to offer the following remarks.

The Commission endeavours every year to adopt the proposal on fishing opportunities in good time so that Member States are able to have a debate at national level, and notes the Houses of the Oireachtas' disappointment that this did not happen in 2015.

As regards the suggestion to assign a specific quota only for smaller fishing operations, the Commission would like to refer to Article 17 of the Basic Regulation of the CFP¹. This Article allows for a range of criteria to be taken into account when allocating fishing opportunities but also indicates that the allocation at national level is the responsibility of national authorities.

On the proposal that fishing vessels entering Irish waters should have their quota checked by the International Council for Exploration of the Seas (ICES) prior to starting fishing in Irish waters, the Commission would like to note that ICES is a scientific body and is not involved in control activities. The control and inspection of vessels can be done by the Irish control authorities. A recent Commission audit of the Irish control system has concluded that the system is working well and the auditors are confident that it is reliable. A risk-based inspection programme is part of this audit system.

The Commission takes note of the request that it should make it compulsory for larger freezer vessels to carry on board independent fisheries monitoring personnel, and informs the Committee that the co-legislators would have to agree to such a monitoring scheme.

Finally, on long-term assistance to the Irish fishing industry, the Commission would like to recall the recent launch of the Irish Operational Programme under the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund² which contains a wide range of options to support the Irish fishing industry.

¹ Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 on the Common Fisheries Policy, amending Council Regulations (EC) No 1954/2003 and (EC) No 1224/2009 and repealing Council Regulations (EC) No 2371/2002 and (EC) No 639/2004 and Council Decision 2004/585/EC (OJ L 354, 28.12.2013, p. 22).

² Regulation (EU) No 508/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 May 2014 on the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulations (EC) No 2328/2003, (EC) No 861/2006, (EC) No 1198/2006 and (EC) No 791/2007 and Regulation (EU) No 1255/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council (OJ L 149, 20.5.2014, p. 1).