



## **Fisheries Policy, Commission Proposal, COM (2011) 417 final, 13.7.2011.**

### **IFPO Comments and Observations**

The Irish Fish Producers Organisation (IFPO) welcomes the opportunity afforded by the DAFM consultation process to express its concerns in relation to the proposals put forward by the European Commission for a reformed Common Fisheries Policy.

The consultation takes place against a background in which the EU Commission initially published a Green Paper which was the subject of detailed discussions, followed by the present phase in which the Commission has produced its initial formal proposal. This proposal will be the subject of extensive discussions over the course of the next year with agreement expected in 2013 on a new CFP.

The IFPO agrees that a new vision is needed, which focuses on a strong and vibrant fisheries sector, which is economically viable and sustainable in the long term. Such a vision if implemented would support and protect coastal communities across Ireland. **However, IFPO believes that the current Commission proposals fall far short of what would be required in many aspects and that the document requires substantial amendment for it to be acceptable.**

### **Relative Stability/TACs and Quotas**

The IFPO recognises the difficulty in securing additional quota over and above the percentages which have been established in the CFP over many years: increase quotas for Ireland would be at the expense of other countries which would be unwilling to countenance such a transfer. The Commissioner has made it clear to the Irish industry that no change is even being thought of in this respect. IFPO is however of the opinion that within the overall structure, there is an opportunity to explore innovative options in how to share out some of the key white fish stocks with other member states such as swapping underutilised quotas on a permanent basis. This would, if executed for a number of whitefish and pelagic stocks, deliver a better and more fit for purpose fishing industry tailored to what individual member states actually need.

### **Hague Preferences**

The Hague Preferences first negotiated in 1976 give Ireland a higher share of some quotas than would otherwise be the case. However, they have to be re-negotiated every year. The IFPO stresses the importance of the permanent incorporation of the Hague Preferences into the Relative Stability framework under a reformed CFP, rather than Ireland having to re-secure them annually.

## **Discard Ban**

The IFPO totally opposes the proposal for a ban on discards in the Commission's proposals. Discarding has received much attention in recent times. Discarding is driven by a combination of technical factors, seasonal patterns, mixed fisheries, legislative restrictions, quota restrictions and market forces.

The IFPO sees the arbitrary discard ban which is now being proposed by the Commission as naïve, unworkable and therefore not contributing to finding a proper solution which would see discards minimised to the lowest practicable levels. Discarding cannot be reduced by introducing a few simple rules as the complexity of the problem requires a fishery by fishery tailored approach. Technical measures need to be designed which are fishery specific to avoid the capture of certain species.

## **Transferable Fishing Concessions (TFCs) / Individual Transferable Quota's (ITQs)**

There has been almost blanket opposition in Ireland to the mandatory introduction of TFCs as proposed by the EU Commission, with the argument centring on the "privatisation" of quota and the risk of foreign control. IFPO does not entirely share this view. The proposal by the Commission for an TFC system is highly problematic in its current form, but might, if amended appropriately, present certain opportunities. The IFPO does not oppose in principle the use of TFCs in certain conditions. However, we do recognise that there are potential difficulties in the implementation of such a system such as concentration of ownership potential for migration of fishing opportunities away from Ireland. It is important that enforceable and effective safeguards are established to address such issues if TFCs are considered.

The IFPO is of the opinion that, whether introduced by the EU or by Ireland itself, there is merit in considering the use of individualisation in terms of quotas, in some fisheries. Such an approach, whether limited by a time period or not, would provide an opportunity for giving certainty in terms of quota shares to vessels and owners which could underpin investment and allow some rationalisation into economic catching units for the fleet. However, the possibility of Irish interests purchasing fishing quota in other countries to achieve the same ends also needs to be considered in all of this. This is an opportunity that should not be dismissed without careful consideration.

## **Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY)**

The IFPO fully supports the concept and practise of responsible, sustainable fisheries and a firm trajectory to securing sustainable exploitation levels. However, we believe that the objective of reaching an MSY exploitation level for all stocks by 2015 is unattainable, inadvisable and potentially counterproductive.

The MSY approach is a technical construct which in theory addresses the potential to exploit stocks to maximum potential without harming the stock in the long term.

The MSY approach is too rigid and cannot be successfully applied in some mixed fisheries situations such as exist predominantly around Ireland.

There are methodological and technical difficulties related to the implementation of the MSY concept which are widely acknowledged in the scientific community.

We support the implementation of MSY for fisheries where the scale of the fisheries is such that they justify the level of analysis and data collection which would be required to implement an MSY approach. However, we believe that strong and reliable indicators for stock abundance and trends can be utilised outside a rigid MSY framework which would be far more appropriate and reliable for management purposes.

### **Regionalisation**

The historical cumbersome system of decision making in relation to the CFP at Council level has only served to widen the gap between those who exploit the resource and those who make the rules. The IFPO sees regionalisation as a positive move to address real time problems and fishery specific issues. A regional approach to fisheries management removes uncertainty and more importantly reduces lag times in decision making, resulting in better and more targeted fisheries management.

However, little has been offered by the Commission to realise regionalisation in the form of a road map in its proposals. The IFPO contends that a framework is needed within the new proposals to realise regionalisation and the devolvement of a new decentralised decision making process. This view is in line with Ireland's response to the green paper on the reform of the CFP. Any new arrangements must give industry and stakeholders the ability to develop fisheries management plans for the seas and fisheries which they are reliant on. Member States and Regional Advisory Councils in conjunction with Producer Organisations have a strong role to play in regionalised process. It is the IFPO's view that such a decentralised approach should be respectful and incorporate sound fisheries management practices as a basic principle. It is the IFPO's view that such an approach should be supported by a strong scientific partnership model. The provenance of such principles should be based on sustainability, socio economic prosperity and the sound exploitation and management of the fisheries stocks within Irish territorial waters.

A challenge of a regionalised input into fisheries management is the relationship of regional structures to the treaty-based centralised EU structures, which must be satisfactorily resolved.

However, we caution against a regionalised approach which runs the risk of creating further unnecessary layers of bureaucracy and which could potentially disadvantage small players such as Ireland in a regionalised context which could be dominated by a smaller number of large countries.

### **Maintenance of Biologically Sensitive Area (BSA) Irish Box**

The IFPO sees it as vital that the Biologically Sensitive Area (BSA) formerly known as the "Irish Box" is included and safeguarded in any new Common Fisheries Policy, as indeed is the Azores box. The inclusion of this biologically sensitive area for spawning stocks and nursery area for certain juvenile stocks cannot be over-emphasised. This is critical for the future of the Irish Fishing Industry.

The IFPO does however see the proposal by the Commission for the maintenance of the existing arrangements for the exclusive six and twelve mile limits as being appropriate and highly important.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, the IFPO have outlined a number of Key concerns which it has with the Commission's current proposals for a new and reformed CFP. The IFPO is of the view that the current proposals do not go far enough to address the failure of the existing CFP. Equally, the current proposals are lacking in detail as regards financial assistance in relation to any transition period to realising a new CFP. It has to be highlighted that the arbitrary and mandatory nature of some of Commissions proposals are in direct contradiction to a bottom-up stakeholder approach and the regionalisation model, held up in the early consultation process as being the new vision for European fisheries management.

IFPO looks forward to further engagement with the Minister, DAFM, other organisations and with the EU Commission and EU Parliament in the course of the coming year to achieve a substantially improved CFP framework which is essential for the future of fish stocks, fishing communities and the fishing industry.

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