

Briefing Paper prepared by Kendrew Colhoun (Research & Library)

## Fisheries Quota Negotiations – Brussels

This briefing outlines key issues facing the Fishing Industry in Northern Ireland as outlined in direct correspondence between representatives of the industry and in recent discussions with the Department. The material primarily draws on notes taken at a meeting between NIA staff and a Department Official on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2007, and should be used to supplement extant papers.

### **Background**

#### **Negotiations**

The EU December Fisheries Negotiations are complex, following an approximate timetable thus:

- Scientific evidence being provided by member states in October via ICES
- Tabled proposals in a series of multilateral negotiations at the European Commission at the end of week ending 30<sup>th</sup> November
- Final outcomes

Negotiations at Member State level will be carried through a 2-3 day period before Christmas 2007 via a series of *compromises* interspersed with recess periods (for bilateral and other negotiations) for Member States.

In addition to the complexities in negotiating across so many Member States, Northern Ireland's priorities have to be balanced with those of other UK regional fisheries. As one of 4 regions in the UK and insofar as deals are being made, the interests of, for example, Scottish and English fisheries have to be considered; proposals and outcomes must therefore be seen as balancing a number of interests. Whilst the Republic of Ireland have a shared interest in the Irish Sea Fishery, this Member States' primary interest lies in the larger Atlantic regions emanating from the major fishing ports in Donegal, Galway, Cork etc.

#### **Fisheries**

- Nephrops  
This is a key Irish Sea Fishery and it is considered *analytical*<sup>1</sup> by the Commission. The quota was increased by 17% in 2007 and the days at sea for this fishery was 204 days. Quotas were also raised in 2005 and 2006 for this fishery in the North Sea fishery off western Scotland. The 2007 increase (achieved December 2006) was achieved following evidence from camera-based survey.  
Anglo-North Irish Fish Producers Organisation (ANIFP) Ltd. argue that this area may be targeted for reduction but without foundation as it is sustainable.  
By-catch

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<sup>1</sup> Meaning that there is an ability to 'bank and borrow'- enabling some carry-over and room for negotiation

- **Herring**  
 The Herring fishery currently sustains 3 boats and three Co. Down processors. The current TAC is 4800 tonnes, three-quarters of which is available to the Northern Irish fleet (3600 tonnes; most of the remaining  $\frac{1}{4}$  to the ROI fleet – 1200 tonnes).  
 As c. 4400 taken it is possible that the TAC for 2007 will be dropped accordingly.  
 300t of Herring is worth approx. £60,000. ANIFP may well seek a return to the level of 400t for Herring – this is important in a NI context but is not a UK priority.
- **Haddock**  
 The biggest TAC issue in the Irish Sea fishery is Haddock. Previous evidence suggested that the species was over-exploited. 1999 saw the first Irish Sea TAC for this species. At that stage the UK and Irish quotas were respectively 47.9% and 43.4%; the UK quota for Haddock has dropped from 5000t to 1179t in 2007.  
 CEFAS state that the Irish Sea stock has increased and there is evidence of good recruitment.  
 The primary issue here seems to be that the lack of good scientific data to back up the perception that the fishery is sustainable at higher TAC levels is likely to lead to some resistance to increase the TAC. ANIFP are arguing for a 500% increase (returning to 1999 levels); a reversal of the 7.5% cut or at best a 15% increase in this year-round fishery seems like a more practical outcome. A 15% increase would equate to around 200t, worth c. £500,000.  
 The absence of landings data (for population assessment) due to limitations of access to boats and/or port landings has limited DARDs ability to put forward a robust argument for an increase in quota which might be acceptable to ICES.
- **Cod**  
 Concerns over the viability of Cod has broader implications for the white fish fleet. Despite a generous TAC, the species is relatively unimportant, being described as relatively scarce. By-catch (from Haddock fishing or Nephrops) is an issue likely to concern the Commission as, despite the Irish Sea Data Enhancement Programme, any increase in Nephrop or Haddock TACs is likely to adversely affect the already dwindling Cod stocks.