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Environment, Food and Rural
Affairs Committee

Implementation of the Common Fisheries Policy: Domestic Fisheries Management

Sixth Report of Session 2010–12

Volume II

Additional written evidence

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Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

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List of additional written evidence

(published in Volume II on the Committee website www.parliament.uk/efracom)

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Written evidence

Written evidence submitted by Mr Duncan Grant, Croeso (Lydd) Ltd

I am the managing director of the above company which owns three under 10m vessels operating in the non-sector from the port of Rye, East Sussex.

The company is a fish wholesales/export operation, taking 100% of fish landed by three netting vessel based at Dungeness, 21 netters and six trawlers at Rye, two netters/rod & line at Eastbourne, and three trawler/netters and 10 netters at Hastings. All agree with my representing their interests on such occasions as this, regional meetings etc.

The current quota system has seen our section trying to survive against all the odds of ever-decreasing monthly quota allocations with a devastating effect on earnings, ability to fund refurbishments, buy new nets etc. Our main target species are Dover sole, plaice, cod and skate in this area. I say are, but now it's a "should-be" as:

cod... Since the cod in 7d have been agreed to be southern north sea stock and log books have been issued it means that boats have to physically cross the line from 7d to 4c if they are to catch any viable quantity. The current 7d allocation is just 50 kilos per month and where it had been thought that linking to 4c would resolve quota issues whereby we have a proven strong cod fishery which has been taken from us—instead the smaller vessels have to take a two hour or more voyage each way (with all the added danger and costs involved) to catch from the same stock as they could catch on their doorstep. Accordingly when they don't make the journey and fish normally, they are forced into an almost 100% discard situation!!

Skate... Aligned to this agreed science with the cod stock the "powers that be" have assumed that skates in 7d are also north sea stock ! We are not aware of any scientific knowledge or appreciable investigation to justify that assumption and had the previous track records been properly examined then it must have been plain-to-see that the relatively few boats that targeted these caught significant quantities. One vessel took part in some scientific survey work and the scientists were amazed at the diversity of species and the quantities caught! That was some four years ago and that vessel landed 27 tonnes that year, now that is just one of six boats that normally fished on skate and it only worked one of the two main seasons each year whereas the others worked both! Now 7d allocations range from just 100 to 250 kilos per month on average, compared for example to other vessels allowances of 40 tonnes over the first two months of this year in the rest of area 7!! This was and should be a viable fishery which would take the pressure of the fishing of the other three main species and reduce discards of those.

Plaice... Similar story with inadequate quota to earn a living and yet fishermen being obliged to land as much of these four targeted species each and every month to stay in business, again causing high discard rates as ours is a mixed fishery with significant overlapping of each species main seasons. This obligation to operate on a monthly quota basis also means that fish of poor quality which are in full roe or are thin having shot their roes have to be taken at times of very poor demand and value.

Dover soles... With the monthly quotas similarly reduced, 2010 saw an appreciable number of fishermen being obliged to lease quota for the first time ever, again involving extra cost and having to fill out logbooks etc. This is generally a situation that is totally alien to us and there seems no rhyme or reason for our quotas to have come to such menial levels—even when compared to recent years. There have been hundreds of tonnes of Channel soles owned by vessels/p.o's left uncaught at year-end for the past few years largely due to mismanagement issues and this situation needs addressing with urgency. How ridiculous is it that small communities are struggling to survive and yet so much high value fish, with high customer demand is going uncaught??!!

Thus **the current monthly quota management system** is unfair, immoral, does not allow anyone to plan their businesses, causes extreme and yet avoidable discards, forces us to target fish when is of low market value, puts pressure on us to go to sea through rough weather if the end of the month is approaching and we have not taken our quota and are desperate to earn what little we can. In short it is a disaster, and god-forbid, a disaster waiting to happen!!

The solution can only be to either:

- (1) have a moratorium on quotas and give boats days at sea and oblige them to land everything they catch. This would give sound and accurate data for stock analysis of course, but then what to do with such knowledge if we are bound by the European Fishery Policy and its unlevel playing field in terms of the UK's "slice of the cake";
- (2) or 2) have substantial local management (which we understand is under discussion) whereby we can, as individuals or as groups of fishermen, make decisions amongst ourselves as to when to go fishing (in relative safety) and to fish for which species by allowing swapping between boats/ leasing or buying quota over time. The consensus amongst those fishermen that land to our company is that they abhor the discards situation, the monthly quota system and would even look to work perhaps beyond those parameters to look at self imposed group measures to reduce discards and fish for better sized fish of higher commercial value, giving consideration to larger mesh sizes etc.

Thanking you for your kind consideration, I very much appreciate this opportunity to have some input in these matters.

1 March 2011

Written evidence submitted by Northern Ireland Assembly Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development

SUMMARY

Sea Fisheries fall within the portfolio of the Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development within Northern Ireland. As a Statutory Committee within the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee exists to both advise and assist the development of policy whilst also ensuring appropriate scrutiny of the work undertaken by the Minister and Department. This briefing paper provides an overview of the main issues identified through the work of the committee in relation to the impacts of the Common Fisheries Policy on the Fishing Industry within Northern Ireland.

The key points within the accompanying paper are as follows:

- The Irish Sea is a small and largely single species fishery (95% nephrops) as a result of both the apparent state of certain fish stocks and due to the impacts of the CFP and its associated TAC and Cod Recovery measures;
- The science on which TACs are set could be further enhanced to establish the true state of fish stocks within the Irish Sea. There could also be a greater role for local fishermen in this process;
- The Northern Irish fishing fleet's reliance on nephrops means that any changes to either the stock or its regulation could have a catastrophic impact on the local fishing industry. In this regard the EC proposals for the creation of Functional Units for nephrops across ICES(International Councils for the Exploration of the Seas) Area VII are a cause for alarm;
- The proposed review of the Cod Recovery Plan offers a way forward, particularly if it increases and enhances the knowledge of stocks in the Irish Sea, but more detail and work is needed to ensure that the review delivers;
- Discards are not a massive issue in the Irish Sea due to the focus on nephrops but more could be done. The adoption of an amendment to the EU Technical Conservation Regulations would enable the specification of a net for use in the Irish Sea which could potentially more than halve the discards of juvenile haddock and whiting in nephrops trawls.

1. The Irish Sea (designated as ICES area VIIa) is a relatively small fishery and on the basis of the scientific evidence utilised by ICES, with the exception of haddock, plaice and herring there are serious concerns at the current stock levels of species such as cod, sole and whiting. In terms of the trends for stocks it is worth noting that ICES believe that the trend for stock of all species, with the notable exceptions of sole and whiting, is improving. It should however be recognised that there will be a time lag between stocks recovering and being able to be fished sustainably.

2. As a result of the total allowable catch system instigated under the CFP and the Cod Recovery Plan it could be argued that the Irish Sea has effectively become a single species fishery. The problems here can be directly linked to the Cod Recovery Plan which has been in force for the Irish Sea since the year 2000, and which has resulted in severe restrictions being placed upon both the number of days that fishermen here can spend at sea (fishing effort) and on the type and quantity of fish they can catch. As a result 95% of the Northern Ireland fishing fleet's effort is focussed on catching nephrops (Dublin Bay Prawns).

3. On the particular issue of nephrops, for a small and self managing fishery like the Irish Sea, the proposed move to a universal TAC and harvest ratio for all nephrop stock in ICES areas IV, VI, and VII, first put forward in 2009, could prove disastrous. The proposed creation of seven smaller Functional Units within area VII, each of which would have their own nephrop TAC, has the very real potential to both restrict movement and thereby reduce flexibility in relation to the sustainable exploitation and management of the nephrop fishery within the western Irish Sea.

4. The present largely self regulated system has operated for over 35 years with boats moving from areas which are not producing to areas that are. It is debatable whether an additional level of bureaucracy and regulation would enable this approach to continue and as such could jeopardise both the viability of the stock and the fleet within the western Irish Sea.

5. For a number of years local fishermen and their representatives have been of the opinion that the science upon which TAC's for the Irish Sea is based is flawed. Concerns around sampling methods and location lead many local fishermen to contend that the scientific picture painted of white fish stocks within the Irish Sea is not an accurate one. There is a real need for enhanced and more robust scientific evidence to establish the state of fish stocks within the Irish Sea.

6. There is also a greater need to explore how local fishermen can be directly involved in the collection of data to inform scientific assessments of stocks. By way of example, as part of a pilot project between

AFBI (Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute) and ANIFPO (Anglo North Irish Fish Producers Organisation) local fishermen have been trained to self sample their catches and independent observers were employed to go to sea with the trawlers to monitor catches and discards—all in an effort to develop more accurate information on both the state of the overall fish stocks and the levels of discard. More could be done to both publicise and further develop this work.

7. A significant outcome from the 2010 EU Fisheries Council has been the commitment by the European Commission to undertake a review of the Cod Recovery Plan. To be effective this review needs to accurately establish both the rates of cod mortality and the levels of discard within the Irish Sea.

8. As a result of the focus by the local fleet on nephrops utilising TR2 gear (nets with mesh sizes between 70–99mm) the discard levels within the Irish Sea are relatively low. Based upon 2009 figures obtained from DARD the total tonnage of discarded fish by the Northern Ireland nephrop fleet was 906 tonnes within the Irish Sea which was broken down as follows:

- Cod—10 tonnes;
- Haddock—268 tonnes; and
- Whiting—628 tonnes.

9. Of those fish which are discarded by the nephrops fishing fleet the majority are as a result of the fish being below the minimum landing size (MLS), effectively meaning that they are too small to be legally landed or sold. In terms of actual discard rates (ie fish discarded out of total catch) in 2009 the Irish Sea nephrops fleet discarded 2–5% of cod caught, 72%–76% of haddock caught and 99%–100% of whiting caught.

10. Work is being done by both local fishermen and AFBI in terms of addressing and further reducing the levels of discard, particularly in relation to haddock and whiting. The Anglo North Irish Fish Producers' Organisation (ANIFPO) has been experimenting with different net mesh sizes to reduce the number of cod, haddock and whiting discarded by vessels pursuing nephrops.¹ In relation to the net mesh experiments the adoption of a 120mm square mesh escape panel (SMP) has been found to allow 54% of juvenile haddock and 65% of juvenile whiting to escape from the net with no loss in nephrops catch.²

11. DARD is seeking an amendment to the EU Technical Conservation Regulations that would enable the specification of this net, which as has been stated could potentially more than halve the discards of juvenile haddock and whiting in nephrops trawls. More consideration could be given to how best Defra and the European Commission could both publicise the success of this work and secure the amendment to the Technical Conservation Regulations.

28 February 2011

Written evidence submitted by Mr Stephen Nuttall, Hastings, East Sussex

For the second time in my life I am privileged to live in a fishing community, the last time being by Macduff in Aberdeenshire.

I am no expert on the complexities of fishing controls, but I am a keen advocate of small local boats for the following reasons.

1. Environmentally the small boats present a smaller consumption of resource in their manufacture and operation.
2. From a stock conservation perspective the small boat fleets have several advantages:
 - 2.1 Smaller gear and lower power are less likely to sweep up whole shoals of fish and leave un-fished corridors on each trip.
 - 2.2 Lower safe weather operating limits, especially for beach launched boats such as at Hastings, give fish stocks “rest days”.
 - 2.3 Boats and crews operating in home waters on a day fishing basis are more accessible for Fishery Control officials to build relationships and control gear and catches.
 - 2.4 While not underestimating the greed of fishermen, there is a level of self interest in stock conservation.
3. From a community point of view the small boats have a significant multiplier effect in terms of the local economy and employment. The presence of the fleet at Hastings, as with the harbour at Macduff, contributes to the tourism offering. The small quantities of fresh fish landed into the community both attract retail buyers to the town and serve numerous resellers to the hinterland. The quality of fresh fish supports high quality local restaurants which again attract visitors and money to the economy.

¹ Fishermen Vindicated by Latest Evidence, New Net December 2010, Anglo North Irish Fish Producers' Organisation (ANIFPO) website, 7 February 2010.

² Briggs, RP, A novel escape panel for trawl nets used in the Irish Sea Nephrops fishery, Fisheries Research Journal 105 (2010) 118–124

4. Small boat fleets present an ideal opportunity to explore more sensible approaches to quotas, by-catches and under-sized catch issues. By any measure, throwing dead or mortally damaged fish back into the sea to serve quotas is unsupportable. Fisheries should be open or closed as stock levels dictate.

In summary, I believe that fishery development should prioritise, favour and protect small local fleets of small boats operating on a day fishing basis. Quid pro quo's might be:

- (a) Less generous scrappage schemes thus encouraging conservation of a sustainable balance between stock and exploiters and discouraging speculative entries to the fishery and
- (b) insistence on fleets maintaining their docking and storage areas in a clean, tidy and safe condition—far from the case today.

Thank you for your attention and best wishes for your deliberations.

23 February 2011
