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## **North Atlantic Fishing Company written evidence to the Public Bill Committee on the Fisheries Bill**

### **Overview**

North Atlantic Fishing Company (NAFCo) is a UK-based pelagic fishing company that operates highly innovative and technology enabled pelagic freezer trawlers. We fish, sort, freeze and store catch on-board the trawlers, before distributing it to developing countries around the world, where it provides millions of nutritious and sustainable meals each year.

NAFCo is strongly opposed to the introduction of a ban of so-called 'supertrawlers' from the UK's Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) as presented in amendment 101 to the Fisheries Bill, following a campaign by Greenpeace. We believe the Greenpeace campaign relies on misconceptions to target our industry, ignores the scientific basis for MPAs and would harm the UK's sustainable fishing industry.

### **About NAFCo**

We are a UK-based fishing company that operates pelagic freezer trawlers in the UK, with 56 fishermen and apprentices based at our offices in Caterham and Hull. Our trawlers fish for pelagic shoaling stocks such as blue whiting, herring, mackerel and horse mackerel. The fish stocks that we fish are large, sustainable and carefully managed with science being the basis for the quotas that are set.

### **Key issues for consideration**

#### **Fishing industry management must always be science-based**

Governments and the fishing industry have a fundamental agreement that designation and management of the various types of MPAs must be science-based. This is important to ensure that sustainable fishing does not become the target of spurious campaigns and we effectively protect marine environments. UK fishing vessels, whether over 100m or otherwise, are permitted to operate in MPAs based on the scientific evidence.

Pelagic fish live and migrate in the water column so Pelagic freezer trawlers use a mid-water trawl, which has no contact with and zero impact on the seabed, which most MPAs are designated to protect.

Our industry is rightly already highly monitored, with mandatory satellite monitoring and automatic identification systems on-board, as well as being subject to regular inspection by the Marine Management Organisation and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency.

#### **100m trawlers fish in exactly the same way as other pelagic fishing trawlers**

The Greenpeace campaign only targets 'supertrawlers' - vessels over 100m in length. This means it only impacts pelagic freezer trawlers that fish large shoaling stocks. There is no rational basis

for this policy. Pelagic freezer trawlers use exactly the same fishing methods as other types of pelagic trawler. The only difference being that pelagic freezer trawlers are 100m in length because they sort, freeze and store their catch on-board instead of landing fresh fish.

Pelagic freezer trawlers only fish for human consumption. We freeze the fish on-board as soon as it is caught, so it can be distributed to developing countries around the world, where it provides millions of nutritious and sustainable meals each year.

### **Pelagic freezer trawlers are innovative and technology enabled to protect iconic wildlife**

Pelagic fishing is actually one of the most selective types of fishing because pelagic trawlers fish for large single species shoals. Pelagic freezer trawlers are highly innovative and technology enabled. Trawler nets are specially designed to allow unwanted by-catch to escape and they use state of the art acoustic equipment to identify the size and depth of a shoal of pelagic fish. 2D and 3D imaging technology identifies the intended shoals for fishing. As such, pelagic freezer trawlers experience barely any by-catch of other species – less than 1%. After decades of collaboration with governments and the scientific community, we are extremely confident about the processes we have in place to ensure we are fishing sustainably.

Contrary to some of the comments made during the Second Reading of the Fisheries Bill, pelagic freezer trawlers do not use electric pulse fishing.

### **Pelagic freezer trawlers do not compete with the UK's smaller fishing fleet**

Pelagic freezer trawlers make up only 7.5% of the entire European large-scale pelagic fleet, and North Atlantic Fishing Company vessels together hold only 5.5% of the total UK quota by tonnage, which is in the form of four abundant low-value species. Our trawlers therefore do not compete with the UK's smaller fishing fleet, which largely target high-value fish species in different fishing grounds.

### **Pelagic freezer trawlers do not 'spend thousands of hours in UK MPAs'**

Greenpeace have calculated that 'supertrawlers' spent thousands of hours fishing in UK MPAs in 2019 (2,963 hours) and the first half of 2020 (5,590 hours). This has been the basis of their campaign but the statistics have been used selectively.

In 2019, 70% of the 2,963 hours were in just one MPA and in the first half of 2020, 90% of the 5,590 hours were in this same single MPA. These Greenpeace calculations include 15 Russian trawlers fishing in this one MPA under a Faroe Islands / Russian fishing agreement which has nothing to do with UK or the EU. This MPA, the Wyville Thomson Ridge, designated to protect bottom features, is in a so called 'Special Zone' of disputed seas on the UK – Faroe Islands EEZ boundaries where the UK and the Faroe Islands share jurisdiction.

Additionally, based on the data available from Global Fishing Watch, the total contribution of fishing hours of vessels over 100m in all UK MPAs is less than 1% of the total fishing effort in MPAs.

It is wrong to propose making regulations for 137 UK MPAs on the basis of these selective Greenpeace statistics, and activity in primarily one single MPA in disputed seas.

## **Conclusion**

We feel strongly that the House of Commons should reject amendment 101, which relies on misconceptions to target our industry, ignores the scientific basis for MPAs and would harm the UK's sustainable fishing industry.

Matthew Cox, CEO of the North Atlantic Fishing Company, would be very happy to answer any further questions you have about pelagic fishing and pelagic freezer trawlers.

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