

UK Trilateral Deal Prompts Calls for EU Action on Nordic Overfishing

Call for new MEPs and Minister for the Marine to act against non-EU countries

Irish fishing leaders have warned that a new trilateral deal between the UK, Norway and the Faroe Islands will lead to overfishing of Ireland's fish stocks. The three-year deal gives the two Nordic non-EU states permission to catch 154,000 metric tonnes of mackerel annually in UK waters. Mackerel is a shared migratory pelagic species that the Irish seafood sector is very heavily reliant on.

The five fishing organisations are calling on MEPs and the Minister for the Marine to urgently speak out against the UK-Nordic deal to force an end to unsustainable overfishing. In striking the deal, they accuse the three non-EU nations of using self-inflated quotas, that have previously seen them overfish by up to 44 % yearly.

The EU fixes quotas for member states but has no power to prevent non-EU States like Norway and the Faroe Islands from setting and inflating their own fishing quotas.

"These Nordic states engage in chronic overfishing, exceeding scientific recommendations," says Aodh O'Donnell, chief executive of the Irish Fish Producers Organisation (IFPO). "This new deal is a grab aimed at gaining a larger share for themselves, at the expense of European and Irish fishermen. Norway and the Faroes use their self-inflated quotas to make deals for greater access to European and UK waters. They intentionally set themselves quotas that are now so high that they can't catch them by fishing solely within their own waters."

Dominic Rihan of the Killybegs Fishermen's Organisation (KFO) explains, "Norway and the Faroes will swap around €150 million in value of their quotas with the UK in return for access to fish mackerel in UK waters. How does this impact Irish fishermen? It ultimately threatens the long-term sustainability of shared migratory stocks like mackerel."

John Lynch of the Irish South and East Fish Producers Organisation says they only learned this week about the new trilateral deal. "They traded their inflated quotas to gain this access to UK waters. At the same time, Irish fishermen comply with scientific advice and keep within their quotas. It's hard to take particularly when you compare the decline in the Irish seafood sector with the phenomenal growth seen in the pelagic fishing industry in the UK, Norway and the Faroes."

Brendan Byrne of the Irish Fish Processors and Exporters Association points out that "Ireland was a pioneer in establishing mackerel fisheries and succeeded in opening global food markets. However, Norway and the Faroe Islands consistently pursue unilateral quota grabs, systematically overfishing. The EU must take measures to address this unsustainable practice."

Among the actions that the EU could take is blocking the access given to non-EU countries to fish in EU waters. It could also explore bi-lateral agreements with other coastal states and look at trade restrictions to force an end to unsustainable overfishing.

Patrick Murphy of the Irish South and West Fish Producers Organisation says, "it is time for the EU to take a stance and apply sensible penalties for this abuse. Ireland is the major quota holder of mackerel and will ultimately be the loser because of the over-exploitation of our shared stocks. Additional trade measures must be implemented to penalise this irresponsible behaviour. Norwegian access to Irish waters to catch their enormous pelagic quotas should be blocked if they cannot agree to a sensible coastal sharing agreement."

The industry representatives say good fisheries management is being ignored in these non-EU state deals and needs to be restored. "The deal done between the UK, Norway and the Faroes is designed to isolate the EU fishermen and force Europe to accept a lower share of the mackerel catch," says Rihan. "We urge the Minister to call out the reprehensible practices of these countries. The Common

Fisheries Policy is not delivering, and we are calling for change. We are asking for an urgent meeting with the minister and his officials.”

Brendan Byrne agrees, “we need to map a way forward, that reverses Ireland’s losses due to Brexit and improves our quota shares. The old ways are not delivering, it is time for Ireland and the EU to fight and negotiate a lifeline for our coastal communities.”

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