



EU Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries, Virginijus Sinkevičius, Meets Irish Fishing Industry in Killybegs



From left to right: Minister Charlie McCConalogue, TD; Sean O'Donoghue, CEO, Killybegs Fishermen's Organisation (KFO); Commissioner Virginijus Sinkevičius; Ciaran Doherty, Chair, KFO.

A wide cross-section of the Irish fishing industry, including representatives of the Irish Producer Organisations, processors, exporters and the Inshore sector, gathered in Killybegs on September 27 to meet the EU Commissioner for Fisheries, Virginijus Sinkevičius, during his two-day visit to Ireland. Due to the on-going COVID-19 restrictions, the meeting was held in the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) premises in Killybegs which facilitated current HSE guidelines for such gatherings. The Commissioner was accompanied by Minister Charlie McCConalogue and his officials.

KFO CEO, Sean O'Donoghue, accompanied by KFO Chair, Ciaran Doherty, met with the Commissioner and conveyed some very clear messages on four key issues of major concern and requested the Commissioner to address these in a meaningful way as matter of urgency. The four issues are: Brexit/Burden sharing, the reckless and irresponsible behaviour of Norway and Faros setting unjustified enormous autonomous mackerel quota, revocation of the weighing permits and the CFP review.

KFO provided a very comprehensive analysis both in volume (tonnes) and value (€) of

the Brexit fallout and its serious negative consequences for Ireland which will continue to mount up until 2025.

The pie-charts below illustrate the end result for Ireland by 2025 when the value of its quota will have further shrunk by 40 per cent when viewed in the context of quota uptake. The KFO requested the Commissioner to bear this in mind and support the urgent need to address the disproportionate cost Ireland has paid under the TCA. It is essential the European Commission address the issue of Burden Sharing, which has not been implemented in a fair or reasonable

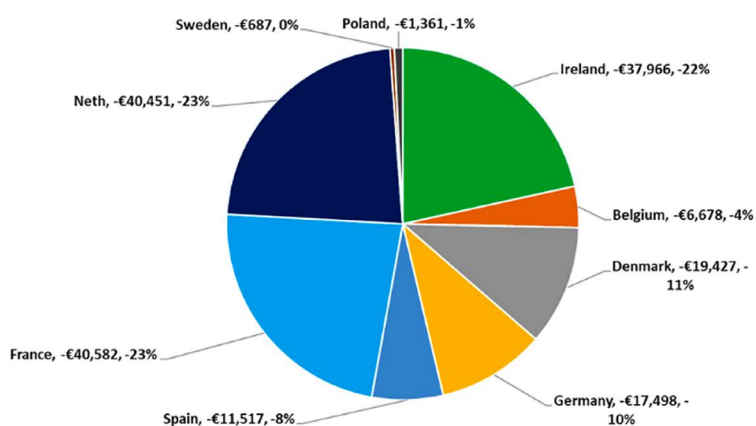
manner and will continue to have a very serious impact on the Irish fishing industry at all levels for the foreseeable future.

In addition to ameliorating loss of mackerel quota for Ireland, the EU must take a stronger position regarding the reckless and irresponsible behaviour of both Norway and the Faros which have set unjustified and enormous autonomous mackerel quotas this year.

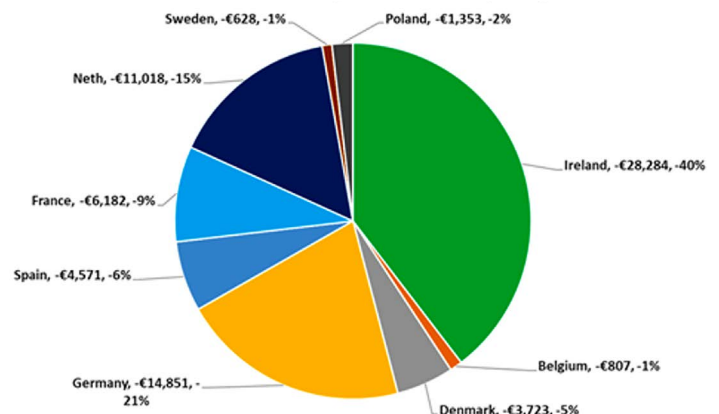
The next issue on the KFO list, was the problem created earlier this year with the Commission Implementing Decision of 13.04.2021 revoking the approval of the Irish control plan submitted for the weighing of fishery products in accordance with Article 61(1) of Council Regulation (EC) No 1224/2009. This has had a catastrophic effect on every vessel in the fleet having to land fish and shellfish under completely unsuitable conditions and undoing years of work developing product standards. Ireland has now submitted a new control plan and it is imperative that the Commission deal with this immediately and also allow for interim measures to be put in place for the Autumn pelagic fisheries, and the requested solution should now be put in place. The Commissioner was also given a demonstration of the recently installed state-of-the-art Flow Scales installed on the pier.

Finally, KFO pointed out to the Commissioner that the review of the CFP was urgently needed given the necessary adjustments now needed in view of Brexit, climate change, other environmental demands and the general shift in stability throughout EU fisheries.

Quota Reductions (€'000/%) attributable to Brexit by Member State in 2025



Quota Utilisation (€'000) attributable to Brexit by Member State in 2025



Latest Advice from ICES on Widely Distributed Stocks

On September 30, ICES released 2022 catch advice for a number of widely distributed stocks including NEA Mackerel, Western Horse Mackerel, Blue Whiting, Boarfish and Atlanto-Scandian Herring.

The 2022 catch advice for NEA Mackerel of 794,920t is given on the basis of the MSY approach. A management strategy evaluation was carried out by ICES in 2020 but no agreement has yet been reached by all parties involved in the fishery on the implementation of the strategy and so the advice is based on F_{MSY} (0.26). The stock is considered to be declining over recent years - from a high of 5.5Mt in 2014 to 3.5Mt in 2021, although it remains above $MSY_{Btrigger}$, the point at which the target fishing mortality would be reduced. Sampling to determine the age structure of the mackerel catch indicates a shift towards an increased proportion of older fish in the catch in recent years. This information leads the assessment to revise up the stock size over recent years compared to the previous assessment but the lower proportion of younger fish is indicative of reduced recruitment to the adult stock in the recent past. This 2022 catch advice, which takes into account that the 2021 catch will exceed that advised, represents a 7 per cent decrease on that for 2021.

The catch advice for Blue Whiting in 2022 is 752,736t - based on the agreed management plan. The stock size continues to decline, mainly because of a period of below average recruitment. However, the stock remains above the management strategy trigger point below which the target fishing mortality would be reduced, and there are indications in both catch and survey data of an increase in recruitment in 2020 and 2021.

The 2022 catch advice of 71,138t for Western Horse Mackerel is a 13 per cent reduction on that for 2021. Although the assessment shows a gradually increasing stock size, the overall level has been revised down with the current stock size close to the B_{lim} value. A recovery plan evaluated by ICES is considered to be precautionary in the long term. However, this plan (which would lead to a lower catch advice) has not been agreed by all parties and so the advice issued by ICES is given on the basis of MSY with the target fishing mortality reduced to account for the low stock size.

Catch advice of 22,791t for boarfish in both 2022 and 2023 represents a 19 per cent increase on the previous figure. The stock is estimated to have been increasing since 2016 with increased recruitment seen in the acoustic survey in recent years.

Catch advice for Atlanto-Scandian Herring in 2022 is 598,588 t. This stock has been declining for several years and, although the 2016 year-class is estimated to be well above average such that the stock size increased in 2021, it is the only strong year class in recent years with subsequent recruitment estimated to be weak.

New Opportunities for KFO Members

Despite the restrictions still in place there is some activity in the scientific research field. A very interesting and potentially valuable project is being developed and will be submitted for approval in November. The lengthy title “Coordinated Development and Implementation of Best Practice in Bycatch Reduction in the North Atlantic Region” can be shortened to CIBBRiNA and it will be submitted under the EU LIFE programme.

This project is aiming to reduce the problem of by-catch for the fishing industry with a combination of tried and tested measures but also a new approach. It will review and assess the previous work done in the field and report on its validity in today's fisheries.

CIBBRiNA will work jointly with fishers, scientists, fisheries and environment ministries and NGOs to minimize bycatch in fisheries which have a high risk of incidental catch of marine mammals, birds, turtles, sharks and rays and to work towards transparent and sustainable fisheries. A prerequisite for all participants is an open mind towards possible solutions. Existing and trialed monitoring and mitigation methods need to be assessed for suitability use by fishers and applicability to multiple gears, regions and species. Consistent with the principles of Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI), cooperation and co-creation with the fisheries industry from early on is a key principle of this project, in which mutual trust, respect and understanding of different perspectives are considered essential. Another fundamental principle for this project and its objectives is to avoid repetition and to build upon existing work, while remaining sensitive to possible limitations of earlier approaches, aiming for practical outcomes and measurable deliverables. In addition, it should be seen as acceptable and valuable to report on what

does not work as much as what is successful.

The main objective of this project is to minimise and, where possible, eliminate bycatch of sensitive species. This will be achieved through EU cross-border and cross-sectoral cooperation, involving industry, scientists, authorities and other relevant stakeholders, to establish regionally coordinated mitigation, monitoring and assessment programmes. For this, a toolbox will be developed, which builds on a review of current approaches and existing national programmes. This will involve:

- i. Participatory approaches to finding solutions for bycatch which focus on the fishers practical constraints, combining results from previous work with targeted pilot schemes within the project;
- ii. a focus on socio-economic aspects and long-term funding mechanisms, to address financial constraints and opportunities with regards to bycatch monitoring and mitigation;
- iii. development, testing, and implementation of effective mitigation measures;
- iv. innovative approaches to monitoring; and
- v. building on current practice (e.g. in OSPAR) to develop methods to assess the conservation implications.

MEESO

Ecologically and Economically Sustainable Mesopelagic Fisheries

MEESO is not a new project – many will be aware of it and may already be engaged. However, it has gained some new impetus recently with the arrival of Rolf Groeneveld, Wageningen University, Netherlands, and MEESO Work Package 6 Leader, to spend a sabbatical in the Killybegs area. KFO, along with Michael Gallagher, BIM, have met with Rolf, who has been speaking to some of those who are already interested, and suggested a meeting

of local operators, such as fishers, processors, gear producers etc., to discuss the possibilities.

Currently BIM, in conjunction with the Marine Institute has applied to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, to carry out a survey which would quantify the extent of the possible fishery. This has not been confirmed as yet.

For further information contact Norah Parke, KFO (norah@kfo.ie 087 9055414)

Neptunus

Calculating Carbon Footprint

Neptunus is a project co-funded by European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) under the umbrella of INTERREG Atlantic Area. The Irish partner is NUI Galway where the team of Alan Kennedy and Ronan Cooney have been involved in several circular economy projects including calculation of Carbon Footprint for a number of aquaculture and agriculture operators.

KFO RSW operators have already completed questionnaires regarding their fishing operations but, on analysis, the data sought was not directly designed for RSW fishing vessels. The Neptunus team visited KFO in August last and engaged with industry members through a hybrid meeting – a small number of members in person and others by Zoom. This meeting was very productive

and enabled a more precise questionnaire to be developed. This has now been completed by almost all RSW operators and the data is being processed.

It would appear that an RSW fishing vessel has a very favourable Carbon Footprint value compared to most agricultural food production systems. Once this KFO sector has been completed the questionnaire will be adapted to specifically facilitate the whitefish and the vivier crabber fleets. This Carbon Footprint evidence should be of immense value both in the market place where it is likely to become a requirement and a useful addition for labels such as Origin Green and Responsibly Sourced Seafood (RSS). It will also be useful when regulations regarding emissions become more stringent.

The IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) held its World Conservation Congress in Marseilles. Despite ongoing travel restrictions there was an enormous attendance of more than 5,000 with an additional 3,500 online participants. The event, originally planned for 2020 and postponed due to Covid-19, was staged in early September to complement the upcoming UN Biodiversity Summit (October 11-15) and the UN Climate Summit (October 31 – November 14.)

“Restoring Ocean Health” came high on the agenda and was probably the most important, along with six other environmental themes. A major debate on the topic of bottom trawling saw the launch of a new coalition, “Transform Bottom Trawling,” which is calling for world leaders to:

1. Establish, expand, and strengthen national inshore exclusion zones (IEZs) for small-scale fishers in which bottom trawling is prohibited;
2. Prohibit bottom trawling in all marine protected areas (outside IEZs) to ensure vulnerable habitats and ecosystems are effectively protected and recovered;
3. End subsidised bottom trawling and allocate financial and technical resources to support a fair transition for fleets; and
4. Prohibit the expansion of bottom trawling to new, un-trawled areas unless and until it can be proven that there are no significant adverse impacts.

Stakeholders need to be aware of the threat such a call poses and ensure their voice is heard in offsetting unreasonable demands from this new NGO.

Commission Withdrawal Of Ireland's Weighing Permits Causing Havoc

Weighing fish is a basic tool available to Managers for implementing Fishery Management plans in many countries. The detail of how weighing is carried out in EU countries is described in Council Regulation 1224 of 2009 (Article 61(1)) as the Weighing of Fishery Products Control Plan. This Plan provides for certain fishery products to be weighed after transport to a destination in Ireland i.e. the premises of registered fish buyers; this rule applies to all species with the exception of landings greater than 10 tonnes of mackerel, herring, blue whiting and all tuna species. There are some exceptions where an MOU exists such as whitefish being exported to Belgium or France which may be weighed at destination.

On April 13, 2021 Ireland's approved Control Plan which enabled this weighing in an approved premises was revoked based on the findings of an audit carried out by the Commission in 2018. Despite several requests, the Commission has refused to release this report to industry. According to the Commission, the findings of the audit identified irregularities, supported by a subsequent administrative enquiry carried out by the SFPA, which said the premises concerned did not have in place a “weighing system fit for purpose.” In effect, all fishery products from that date must be weighed when landed on the pier. Significantly, industry was never allowed a copy of the audit report which, in a civilian court, would be considered extraordinary.

The consequences of weighing on the pier are negative in a number of ways, not least the enormous risk to the seafood being treated in this way – exposure to the elements, no protection from contamination, live shellfish unfit for onward transport, weighing scales being transported inappropriately – all contributed to considerable chaos for the industry.

In Killybegs, the industry took remedial action by installing a state-of-the-art Flow Scales on the pier. However, the SFPA refused to allow its use. This was overturned by the court and has now been approved. It was demonstrated in action recently when Commissioner Sinkevičius visited Killybegs.

Since the revocation of the Irish Control Plan, the KFO has worked tirelessly to have a new Control Plan in place. The KFO also requested that the SFPA notify industry when it did submit a new Control Plan which the SFPA did - the new Control Plan was sent to the EU Commission on September 24. It is expected that this will take around eleven weeks to process but it hoped this can be approved in a shorter timeframe given the comments of Commissioner Sinkevičius in Killybegs on September 27. There is still a problem for the pelagic sector in Killybegs for the remainder of 2021, as the only option will be the Flow Scales which, effective as it is, will have to weigh all pelagic landings until the end of December. An interim solution must be found.

On October 1, 2021 the Task Force held its final meeting. Since its inaugural meeting in March there have been 14 meetings.

Following the conclusion of negotiations between the United Kingdom and the European Union on Christmas Eve December 2020, a Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) was signed. This was supported on the EU side with a plan for the Brexit Adjustment Reserve fund (BAR) to help offset the economic impacts of the withdrawal of the UK and to support member states, particularly those such as Ireland, which had been most affected. Irish fishing and its associated seafood businesses were high on a list of sectors most affected, such as:

- Ireland lost 15 per cent of its annual quota consisting mostly of its valuable stocks of pelagic fish (mackerel (26 per cent) and Nephrops (14 per cent));
- Irish seafood exports to the UK worth €80 million before Brexit are reduced and uncertain;
- Irish seafood imports from the UK on which retail and processing are dependent are disrupted and more expensive;
- Irish seafood routes, particularly valuable live shellfish, dependent on the UK “land-bridge” are less reliable and substantially more expensive; and
- Many valuable Irish/UK industry, financial, scientific and policy links have been weakened or lost.

In an effort to offset some of these very serious threats to the seafood industry and wider coastal communities, Minister McConalogue set up the Task Force to assess the extent of the problems and find solutions. The Task Force was made up of a Steering Committee, representatives of all sectors within the fishing industry, relevant State Agencies, local government and tourism. The Task Force held its inaugural meeting in March 2020 at which three key priorities were identified:

1. Brexit and the urgent need to address burden sharing in terms of the disproportionate cost Ireland has paid;
2. Short-term financial measures under the Brexit Adjustment Reserve Fund (BAR) to ameliorate the losses; and
3. The review and reform of the CFP.

The interim report covered the burden sharing and a temporary cessation scheme of polyvalent vessels. The temporary cessation scheme is now in place for 2021 covering the three-month period October to December 2021.

The final report contains a large number of schemes covering the entire seafood sector including: Decommissioning whitefish sector; Pelagic Schemes; Inshore; Co-ops; Processing Liquidity scheme; Polyvalent tie-up including squid scheme (2022); Inshore Short-term Support; Scallop Schemes; Onshore/Offshore Initiatives; Aquaculture; Small scale Public Marine; Infrastructure; Community Led Local Development; Inshore Longer-term Supports; Inshore marketing; and Processing Capital (Including Inshore).

The total financial support covering all of these schemes is in excess of €430 million. It is expected that the final Task Force report will be shortly presented to Minister McConalogue.

Editorial



by Sean O'Donoghue

CHIEF EXECUTIVE, KFO



advised us that a new Control Plan has been submitted and that the Commission has indicated an 11-week turnaround

The ICES Advice for widely distributed stocks was released as usual on September 30. The 2022 catch advice for mackerel is 794,920 tonnes which is a 7 per cent decrease compared to 2021 due to the 2021 catch advice being exceeded. A management strategy evaluation was carried out in 2020 but as yet no agreement has been reached on implementation. Other important fisheries for the Irish industry, Western Horse mackerel, blue whiting, and Atlanto-Scandian herring have advised cuts of 19 per cent, 12 per cent and 8 per cent respectively, but boarfish has been advised with an increase of 19 per cent due to continued increase in stock since 2016.

Environmental issues continue to pose threats at many levels. We are about to enter a period of intense activity regarding environmental debates (see page three) which kicked off with the major IUCN congress in Marseilles in early September. We are very concerned with the latest drive to eliminate bottom trawling with the setting up of a new NGO with this specific aim. Within a few days the UN Biodiversity meeting takes place; this will be a virtual event but effective nonetheless and will be rapidly followed by the live UN Climate Change meeting in Glasgow. The threats to the fishing industry from declines in biodiversity and climate change are very real but, unfortunately, may be overlooked while the more politically minded seize the opportunity to advance their own green agenda.

On a more positive note, KFO is very supportive of a very interesting EU LIFE project, CIBBRiNA, being submitted next month (see page two.) This is a project which aims to reduce the problem of by-catch for fishermen and will examine the problem across a wide range of by catch issues and how they can be mitigated.

We are also pleased to see there have been some developments regarding the MEESO project. KFO will be cooperating with the project Work Package leaders and hopefully host a small workshop, now that restrictions are being eased, to establish the current level of information and feasible opportunities for our members.

The KFO Carbon Footprint census is progressing. Most of the RSW fleet have submitted their data and we hope to see the results in the very near future. Once completed we will extend the process for our whitefish and vivier crabber members.

The Brexit fallout continues to take up an inordinate share of everyone's time and energy. The Burden Sharing issue is now a key priority and both the Task Force's Interim and Final Reports have identified it as such. The KFO made this our number one issue when Commissioner Sinkevičius visited Killybegs on September 27 (see article page one.) It is very obvious when you examine the pie charts on page one that Ireland has been disproportionately hit with an incredible 40 per cent in value when the actual quota uptakes are taken into account.

The Task Force has now completed its work and prepared a Final Report. Set up by Minister McConalogue in response to the very serious threats facing all sectors of the Irish seafood industry, the Task Force has already delivered an Interim Report which dealt with the burden sharing issue and temporary cessation scheme now already being operated for the polyvalent sector.

The Final Report contains a comprehensive overview of the challenges still facing the industry and an array of schemes to counter those challenges. Congratulations to the Committee, its Chair and Steering Committee and the great work carried out by BIM.

Aside from Brexit, this has been a very challenging year for the fishing industry. In April we were shocked to find out the Irish Control Plan had been revoked by the European Commission based on a 2018 audit, which the Commission has refused to give us a copy of. To comply with the contingency plan which automatically kicks in in such a situation i.e. all fish must be weighed when landing on the pier, the local Killybegs industry installed a state-of-the-art Flow Scales but the SFPA would not permit it to be used for their monitoring purposes. It took a court case to overcome that unnecessary impediment. The SFPA have

Important Dates October - December 2021

DATE	MEETINGS	VENUE
Sep 30	ICES Advice (Pelagic Stocks) Published	Virtual
Oct 4	Marine Institute - IFSRP	Virtual
Oct 5	Pelagic AC - Herring Focus Group	Virtual
Oct 5	PelAC WG1	Virtual
Oct 6	PelAC WG2	Virtual
Oct 7	PelAC General Assembly & Executive Committee	Virtual
Oct 7	Joint NSAC/NWWAC Sea Bass FG	Virtual
Oct 11-12	Fisheries Council	Luxembourg
1Oct 19-22	Coastal States Mackerel	London/Hybrid
Oct 20	Quota Management Advisory Committee (QMAC)	Virtual
Oct 25-27	Coastal States (Blue Whiting & Atlanto-Scandian herring)	London/Hybrid
Oct 26	LDAC - WG2	Virtual
Oct 27	NPWG	London
Oct 27	EAPO - ExComm	Brussels
Oct 28	EAPO - General Assembly	Brussels
Oct 28-29 TBC	EU-Norway-UK annual consultations for 2022 (Round 1)	London/Hybrid
Nov 3-5 TBC	EU-UK annual consultations for 2022 (Round 1)	London/Hybrid
Nov 9-11 TBC	EU-UK annual consultations for 2022 (Round 2)	Brussels & Hybrid
Nov 15-19 TBC	EU-Norway-UK annual consultations for 2022 (Round 2)	London/Hybrid
Nov 15	Fisheries Council	Brussels
Nov 16-18 TBC	EU-UK annual consultations for 2022 (Round 3)	London/Hybrid
Nov 22-26 TBC	EU-Norway annual consultations for 2022 (Round 1)	(TBC)
Nov 23-25 TBC	EU-UK annual consultations for 2022 (Round 4)	Brussels & Hybrid
Nov 26	Inter-Acs meeting with DG MARE	TBC
Nov 30	LDAC - ExCom	Madrid/Hybrid
December	EU-Faroe Islands annual consultations for 2022	TBC
Dec 13-14	Fisheries Council	Brussels

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