Editorial

by Sean O'Donoghue

CHIEF EXECUTIVE, KFO

It is very unsatisfactory that yet again for a third year in a row the Fisheries Council which finished in the early hours of Tuesday morning December 13, has set provisional TACs and quotas for the first quarter of 2023. This is particularly so given that the EU/UK negotiations were concluded on Sunday December 11, but have not been signed which meant that the Council could not definitively set TACs and quotas for 2023. The December Fisheries Council has become a Christmas farce.

However, the good news is that the interim quotas are likely to be changed by next week - assuming the EU/UK agreement is signed - in order for the full years TACs and quotas to apply from January 1, 2023. If that is the case, we can expect to see significant increases in *Nephrops* or Dublin Bay prawns particularly Porcupine nephrops, haddock area VI, hake, monkfish area VII and saithe area VI.

A disappointing aspect of Council was the deferral of the decision on the contentious 12,000 tonnes of mackerel Denmark used to fish in Norwegian waters prior to BREXIT, which was taken from the western mackerel stock, due to the fact that the Danish Government had not been formed and as a consequence the Minister had no mandate. We need this issue resolved at the earliest opportunity and we have directly requested that Minister Charlie McConalogue ensure this is placed at the top of the agenda of the first Council of 2023.

A further complication at this year's Council was the stalling of EU/Norway negotiations on Friday, December 9 which had implications for setting the 100 per cent blue whiting TAC at the Council. Even though the Coastal States had agreed in the 81 per cent increase in blue whiting for next year, the Council set the TACs for next year at 80 per cent of the increased blue whiting TAC to allow for the resumption of negotiations with Norway. I have gone on record to say that given the proximity of Ireland to the main fishing grounds of this stock, landings into Ireland are attractive for foreign vessels. It is therefore of critical importance that if the negotiations are resumed, any transfer to Norway is kept at a very low level and that access to the Irish Box is paid for by the transfer of blue whiting quota.

This December sees the winding-up of the Scientific Monitoring TAC for NW Herring fishery which began in 2016. Thanks to the buy-in from industry the necessary samples were collected and contributed to a ground-breaking genetic analysis which demonstrated the real herring population structure in north western waters. In addition to improving the fishery opportunities for Irish fishermen in the northwest, this population genetics approach has created an important tool for many other fisheries with similar problems. We are also pleased that this fishery can now revert to the previous management regime (Policy Directive 1&2 of 2012) and thanks to all those who contributed to the operation.

This year has seen the progress of the Offshore Renewable Energy (ORE) programme advance on many fronts and KFO has been involved at many stages. The establishment of a Seafood-ORE Working Group has provided an important opportunity to ensure the needs and ambitions of the fishing industry are highlighted and KFO has seized this opportunity to inform developers and regulators how vital the role of the fishing, and wider seafood industry, is in any marine enterprise. This is a two-way conversation which, if managed correctly, can benefit all stakeholders.

Environmental issues continue to dominate many fishing operations and we have dealt with several this year. The DG MARE/DG ENVI intention to implement the Deep-Sea Access Regulation has been postponed until the basis of the regulation has been scrutinised. ICES has undertaken to re-assess its Advice from 2016 and will not complete this process until late January 2023 at the earliest. It is likely to take until the end of September before there is further action regarding implementation of the Regulation. However, closer to home, the Department of Local Government has proposed two substantial SACs (see page three) which is currently open for consultation.

In addition, efforts to restore biodiversity (page two) have gained some momentum with the publishing of Ireland's 4th Biodiversity Action Plan following a major meeting in Dublin Castle (June) and the Citizens Assembly recently which I addressed on behalf of the fishing industry. BIM has adopted a strategy goal to "Protect and Restore Biodiversity" which we will all support.

Finally, on behalf of all the KFO staff, I would like to wish all our members a very happy and healthy Christmas and prosperous fishing in 2023. I look forward to working with you to address both the challenges and opportunities in the coming year.

Fisheries Council has Become a Festive Sideshow

Sean O'Donoghue, in his role as chairperson of the Pelagic Advisory Council and together with fellow AC chairs and vice-chairs, attended a meeting with EU Commissioner, Virginijus Sinkevičius, to inform him of their views on the TACs in advance of the Council of Fisheries Ministers. A number of very important issues were raised such as mackerel, western horse mackerel, blue whiting, herring, quality assurance of ICES advice, energy transition as well as the economic performance of the fleet. The Commissioner assured the representatives that he was fully aware of the effect the war in Ukraine was having on the seafood sector particularly the very high fuel costs and he committed to support the sector in order that it remains economically viable in these uncertain times.

Unfortunately, this positive dialogue was not followed up at the Fisheries Council where the outcome was no better than the previous year with provisional TAC and Quota figures for 2023. This is most unsatisfactory and will cause the same problems in 2023 as it did in 2022. Additionally, the continued overfishing of mackerel in the Northeast Atlantic by Norway and the Faroe Islands must be addressed urgently by the Council of Ministers to prevent further damage to this stock.

EU Fisheries Commissioner, Virginijus Sinkevičius (5th from right) pictured with the chairpersons and vice-chairpersons of the Advisory Councils to solicit their views on the TACs and quotas for 2023 in advance of Fisheries Council on December 11-12, 2023. Seán O'Donoghue (second from left), CEO of the KFO, attended as chairperson of the Pelagic Advisory Council.

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KFO news

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IRISH QUOTAS 2023

ANOTHER YEAR OF PROVISIONAL TACS AND QUOTAS SET AT FISHERIES COUNCIL

EU/UK Agreement Likely to be Signed

It is unsatisfactory that yet again for a third year in a row the Fisheries Council which finished in the early hours of Tuesday morning December 13, has set provisional TACs (Total Allowable Catch) and quotas for the first quarter of 2023. Even though the EU/UK negotiations were concluded on Sunday, December 11, the agreement has not been signed, which meant that the Council could not definitively set TACs and quotas for 2023. However, the interim quotas are likely to be changed by next week - assuming the EU/UK agreement is signed - in order for the full years' TACs and quotas to apply from January 1, 2023.

A further complication as this year's Council was the stalling of EU/Norway negotiations on Friday, December 9, which had implications for setting the 100 per cent blue whiting TAC at the Council. Even though the Coastal States had agreed the 81 per cent increase in blue whiting for next year, the Council set the TACs for next year at 80 per cent of the increased blue whiting TAC to allow for the resumption of negotiations with Norway (see provisional tables below.)

The Council deferred the decision on the contentious 12,000 tonnes of mackerel Denmark used to fish in Norwegian waters prior to BREXIT, which was taken from the western mackerel stock, due to the fact that the Danish Government had not been formed and as a consequence the Minister had no mandate.

The tables below are provisional Irish quotas for 2023. Column three shows the percentage of year, which for most species is 25 per cent, except for mackerel, western horse mackerel, blue whiting, Atlanto scandia herring, albacore tuna, boarfish, whiting b-k, sole and plaice 7bc, cod 6b and the deep-water species. The reference year to calculate the percentages is shown in column five. It is likely that these provisional figures will be replaced by the full year TACs and quotas next week.

PROVISIONAL IRISH FISH QUOTAS

PELAGIC QUOTAS
(PROVISIONAL and FINAL)

SPECIES	ICES AREA	% of Year	Provisional Quota	Reference Year
Mackerel	6, 7, 8, 5b, 2a, 12, 14	100%	52,385	2023
Horse mackerel	2-4,-6-7-8-5b, 12, 14	70%	2,297	2023
Horse mackerel	4b, 4c, 7d	25%	47	2022
Blue whiting	1-8, 12, 14	80%	47,744	2023
Herring	1, 2	100%	2,646	2023
Herring	5b, 6b, 6aN	25%	116	2022
Herring	6aS, 7b, 7c	25%	309	2022
Herring	7a	25%	127	2022
Herring	7g, 7h, 7j, 7k	25%	189	2022
Northern albacore	Atlantic Ocean	100%	3,244	2023
Greater silver smelt	3a, 4	25%	1	2022
Greater silver smelt	5, 6, 7	25%	205	2022
Boarfish	6, 7, 8	50%	7,875	2022

AREA VI WHITEFISH STOCKS
(PROVISIONAL and FINAL)

SPECIES	ICES AREA	% of Year	Provisional Quota	Reference Year
Cod	6a, 5b	25%	51	2022
Cod	6b, 5b	100%	3	2023
Megrim	5b, 6, 12, 14	25%	153	2022
Anglerfish	6, 5b, 12, 14	25%	110	2022
Haddock	5b, 6a	25%	171	2022
Haddock	6b	25%	94	2022
Whiting	6, 5b, 12, 14	25%	137	2022
Plaice	6, 5b, 12, 14	25%	63	2022
Pollack	6, 5b, 12, 14	25%	6	2022
Saithe	6, 5b, 12, 14	25%	89	2022
Common sole	6, 5b, 12, 14	25%	11	2022
Norway lobster	6, 5b	25%	40	2022

Critical Environmental Issues in 2022

2022 was heralded as "Super Year for Oceans" and a number of important events were held in keeping with this theme. Another key focus was on biological diversity, commonly referred to as biodiversity. Biodiversity is of crucial importance to marine life including fish, in addition to its central role in underpinning all the delicately balanced ecosystems on which life depends. Maintaining existing and restoring threatened biodiversity has become the objective of many agencies and industries, and the fishing community has been to the forefront in meeting this challenge.

At a global level, biodiversity issues are pursued by the United Nations. Biodiversity is directly linked with climate change through international agreements such as the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), both established at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. As of 2022, there are 196 Parties to the CBD convention, including the European Union and each of its member countries. Ireland signed the convention in 1992 and ratified it in 1996. Driven by these Conventions, in 2022 there have been a series of global UN meetings regarding biodiversity which includes COP 15 in Montreal running from December 7-19.

In Ireland, responsibility for implementing the CBD is the remit of the Heritage sector of the DHLGH which, following the Dublin Biodiversity Conference in June this year, launched its 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan. This ambitious Action Plan has set targets for all sectors and, most importantly, will back up its work with legal obligations. There has already been public consultation on this Action Plan such as the Citizen's Assembly held in November in which KFO was represented by Sean O'Donoghue.

BIM's current strategy plan, Turning the Tide 2022-26, has the stated goal to "Protect and Restore Biodiversity" and has committed to develop and activate solutions in response to biodiversity loss by working together with the sector, and with local, national and EU sources of knowledge and funding.

AREA VII WHITEFISH STOCKS
(FINAL and PROVISIONAL)

SPECIES	ICES AREA	% of Year	Provisional Quota 2023	Reference Year
Cod	7a	25%	19	2023
Cod	7b, 7c, 7e-k, 8, 9, 10	25%	85	2022
Megrim	7	25%	707	2022
Anglerfish	7	25%	744	2022
Haddock	7b-k, 8, 9, 10	25%	717	2022
Haddock	7a	25%	288	2022
Whiting	7a	25%	106	2022
Whiting	7b-k	100%	3,417	2022
Plaice	7a	25%	258	2022
Plaice	7b, 7c	100%	17	2023
Plaice	7f, 7g	25%	36	Footnote 1
Plaice	7h, 7j, 7k	25%	19	Footnote 2
Pollack	7	25%	142	2022
Saithe	7, 8, 9, 10Nor S 62° N	25%	350	2022
Small-eyed Ray	7f, 7g	25%	3	2022
Common sole	7a	25%	26	2022
Common sole	7b, 7c	100%	17	2023
Common sole	7f, 7g	25%	10	2022
Common sole	7h, 7j, 7k	25%	24	2022
Norway lobster	7	25%	1,399	2022
Norway lobster	FU 16	70%	711	Footnote 3

Footnotes: **1**. 25%of 2022 quota including 77% reduction **2**. 25% of 2022 quota including 61% increase **3**. 70% of Irish quota 2022

AREA VI, VII & OTHER WHITEFISH STOCKS
(FINAL and PROVISIONAL)

SPECIES	ICES AREA	% of Year	Provisional Quota 2023	Reference Year
Cod	Nor 1, 2	0%	0	NA
Hake	6, 7, 5b, 12, 14	25%	596	2022
Redfish	5; 12, 14 (shallow)	25%	0	NA
Ling	6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 14	25%	263	2023
Blue Ling	2, 4	25%	1	2022
Blue Ling	5b, 6, 7	25%	7	2022
Tusk	5, 6, 7	25%	59	2022
Greenland halibut	2a, 4, 5b, 6	25%	7	2022
Skates and rays	6a, 6b, 7a-c, 7e-k	25%	294	2022
Undulate Ray	7d, 7e	25%	126	2023
Picked dogfish	1, 5, 6, 7, 8, 12, 14	25%	470	Footnote 4

Footnotes: **4**. 2023 quota for a directed fishery.

DEEPWATER STOCKS
(FINAL QUOTAS)

SPECIES	ICES AREA	% of Year	Provisional Quota 2023	Reference Year
Black scabbardfish	5, 6, 7 12	100%	14	2023
Roundnose grenadier	5b, 6 7	100%	38	2023
Roundnose grenadier	8, 9, 10, 12 14	100%	1	2023
Alfonsinos	3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12 14	100%	2	2023
Red seabream	6, 7, 8	100%	1	2023

Seafood-Offshore Renewable Energy Working Group Set Up

The launch of Ireland's intention to develop Offshore Renewable Energy (ORE) has possibly been the most important event in recent times with economic and social implications for all sectors. The ambition to reach a carbon-free energy source by 2050 is, by and large, accepted as necessary and will provide a clean and possibly inexpensive energy which will bring increased prosperity to Ireland and beyond. However, this ambition is not without threat to existing industries which already occupy the environment where ORE will, of necessity, be located. The most obvious industry which could be affected is fishing, which involves more than re-locating fishing vessels to alternative waters. The supply chain which underpins the fishing industry is worldwide and extremely complex and what might appear to be minor changes to where fishing takes place can have downstream consequences which are both unintended and irreversible. Fishing communities are particularly vulnerable to changes in their environment, such as changes in where vessels fish.

Against a background of considerable worry among some fishing communities regarding existing applications for offshore windfarms, the government set up a Seafood-ORE Working Group to promote dialogue and develop a communications strategy among both sectors. The WG is headed up by Captain Robert McCabe who has already held a number of meetings in an effort to advance an understanding between the parties.

KFO, along with fellow Irish South and East Producer Organisation, has submitted a detailed document outlining a comprehensive method of working that ensures all stakeholders are actively involved in the formulation of ORE applications and not just informed after the event as a *fait accompli*. The submission insists that the renewable energy sector recognise the vital role that fisheries play in delivering food security and ensure that the activities of the ORE industry do not undermine the future economic prosperity of those employed in the fishing industry either at sea or ashore.

The KFO and IS&EPO added considerable detail regarding future applications under the heading "New Approach" to address the future relationship between the Irish fishing industry and ORE developers. This would include Marine Spatial Planning issues such as the production of DMAPs and the role of the fishing industry in identifying suitable ORE sites, the role of Fishery Liaison Officers, post-planning engagement of developers with the fishing industry and the continued engagement at every stage from construction to eventual decommissioning. The submission was well received by the WG and is expected to be incorporated into the final output of the Seafood-ORE WG.

Deep-Sea Regulation* and Proposal for SACs in Porcupine Shelf and Southern Canyons Increase Uncertainty for Stakeholders

On November 18, 2022, the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH) issued a Notice of Designation to render two sites as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) in accordance with the EU (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (S.I. 477 of 2011). SACs form part of "Natura 2000," a network of protected sites throughout the European Union. The sites, Porcupine Shelf (002267) and Southern Canyons (002278) are located on the edges of the Continental Shelf off Ireland's north-west coast and south-west coast respectively (see maps.)

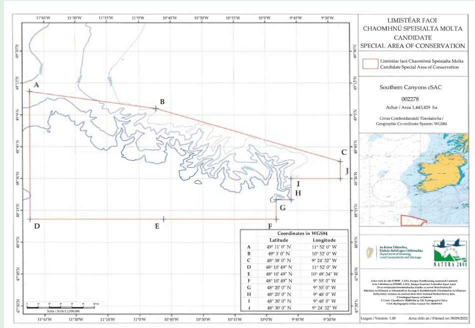
This Designation Notice specifically targets "Activities Requiring Consent (ARCs)" which in this instance are listed as:

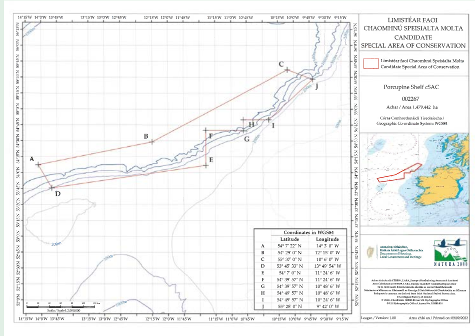
ARC-03 Blasting, drilling, dredging or otherwise removing or disturbing fossils, rock, minerals, mud, sand, gravel or other sediment.

ARC-08 Undertaking scientific research involving the collection and removal of biological material.

The sites being referred to in this Notice have been identified as being of ecological importance, but are also of importance to the fishing industry which is already being impacted by a wide range of other issues including the implementation of the Deep-Sea Regulation. The fishing industries of Ireland, France, Portugal and Spain have joined forces under the umbrella organisation European Bottom Fishers Alliance (EBFA) to have the proposed implementation of the Deep-Sea Regulation delayed pending a complete review of what is considered in many quarters to be a very flawed piece of legislation. The EBFA has been successful in having the implementation delayed pending a review of some content in the Deep-Sea Regulation. To this end, earlier this month the ICES Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems Advice Drafting Group (ADGVME) convened to review and update its previous advice, issued in January 2021, and decided to re-run earlier assessments on which its advice had been based. This process in ongoing and will not be concluded until late January 2023, when updated advice will be issued.

*Deep sea access Regulation 2016/2336





Industry to set up Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) Scheme for Fishing Gear

Minister Ryan (DECC) recently published the Statutory Instrument 612 of 2022*, which requires an approved industry body to set up an Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) Scheme for fishing gear containing plastic.

Key requirements of the scheme are to:

- Establish and maintain a register of all gear producers placing goods on the Irish market;
- Set rules and roles of membership;
- Propose plans on meeting annual collection rates of fishing gear with plastic ; and
- Develop a business and financial plan for the EPR.

Why is this relevant to fishermen?

Many EPRs include end-users in their membership, e.g. farmers in the farm plastic's EPR. Fishers who are importing gear directly, become a gear producer themselves and will need to register with the scheme.

Joint industry-led approaches with gear suppliers, vessel owners and ports can reap benefits such as designing an EPR that works for the sector, controlling costs and having good data on collection rates. This data is useful to refute claims of ghost gear in the sector.

In November, a meeting of gear suppliers was held in Ballybofey to begin the process of understanding and interpreting the new requirements. Another meeting is scheduled in January. Gear suppliers welcome stakeholders such as fishers, producer organisations, waste contractors and members of the plastics industry to join them in designing the EPR.

For further information, contact Catherine Barrett, Fisheries Development Officer, BIM

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*https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2022/si/612/made/en/print#

Provisional 2022 Egg Survey Results Show 25% Increase in NEA Mackerel Biomass

The International Mackerel and Horse Mackerel Egg Survey (MEGS) takes place every three years and was conducted most recently in 2022. This is a multi-national survey coordinated by the ICES Working Group on Mackerel and Horse Mackerel Egg Surveys, WGMEGS. In 2022, for the first time in more than 20 years, the North Sea egg survey was carried out in the same year as the western and southern surveys, which was previously delayed by one year. The surveys were carried out by 11 laboratories from nine participating countries, from mid-January and the end of July. Participants included Portugal, Spain/IEO, Spain/AZTI, Netherlands, Germany, Ireland, UK/Scotland, Norway, Faroes, Denmark and UK/England.

This year the survey programme comprised six time periods and encompassed 18 separate surveys. Each lab was assigned a time period and survey area by the survey coordinator. Ireland conducted two surveys in 2022, a three-week one in March, and a subsequent one in June. The June survey was terminated after one week due to unforeseen vessel issues.

Participants on the MEGS surveys carry out a series of plankton tows every half ICES statistical rectangle, (figure 1,) from which mackerel and horse mackerel eggs are extracted, counted and their stage of development noted. The plankton sampler is towed on a v-shaped tow to within 5m of the bottom, or a maximum depth of 200m if in deeper waters off the shelf. A CTD, attached to the sampler, provides real-time data. This allows the operator to monitor the depth of the sampler during the tow, as well as providing data on temperature and salinity.

During the survey, marks of fish are fished on, adult fish are caught and samples are collected from the female gonads for histological work. Histological analysis provides estimates of fecundity, the number of eggs produced by each female, and atresia, the number of those eggs not spawned and reabsorbed, to feed into the spawning stock biomass calculation. Due to the timescale involved in completing the histology work, WGMEGS only provides a preliminary estimation of fecundity in 2022.

All survey participants provided their egg data, and preliminary fecundity data, to the survey coordinator by the end of July and a provisional spawning stock biomass was provided to WGWIDE, the ICES mackerel and horse mackerel assessment group, for their meeting at the end of August.

The 2022 survey results show that peak spawning for mackerel occurred during March in the southern area, and May in the western area. For the western and southern surveys combined, mackerel egg production was calculated at 2.12*1015 eggs, a 29 per cent increase compared to what was reported in 2019. The biomass figure was calculated by combining the egg counts with the provisional figure of female fecundity and the sex ratio of the population. This southern and western biomass was calculated to be 3.88 million tonnes, an increase of 25 per cent since 2019. Over the next few months the remainder of the fecundity and atresia samples will be analysed and a final biomass will be worked up at the WGMEGS meeting in April 2023, for submission to WGWIDE in August 2023. In conjunction with information from other scientific surveys, and sampling from the commercial catch, the most recent assessment indicates that the mackerel stock has stabilised at around 4 million tonnes, following a period of decline.

Data for the North Sea was submitted to WGWIDE separately. The design of the North Sea survey is different to the other areas in that it comprises one pass through the survey area during the time of peak spawning. There is a strong emphasis on the collection of adult samples for histological analysis. This is only the second year of this new survey design. Egg counts were 50 per cent lower in 2022 than were reported for 2021. As this survey took place in June there was no histology data available prior to WGWIDE, this data will again be presented to WGMEGS in 2023.

For the western horse mackerel stock 2022 annual egg production was calculated as 5.15*1014 eggs. Following a historic low estimate from the 2019 survey, the 2022 survey results indicate increased egg production, with a peak in survey period six, although overall levels remain low compared to earlier surveys.

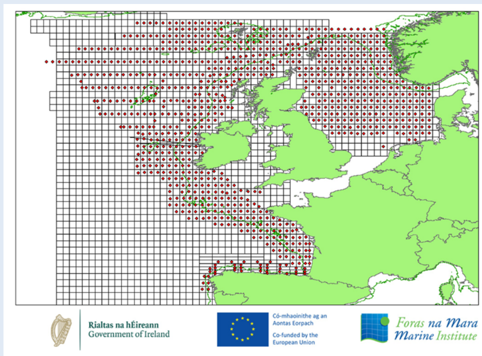

Figure 1: Stations sampled at least once during the 2022 MEGS survey