

Mackerel at Tipping Point:

Seafood Ireland Alliance Slams Failure of Coastal States to Act

The Seafood Ireland Alliance (SIA) has warned that the future of Europe's most valuable pelagic stock is in jeopardy after Coastal States once again failed to agree on a plan to save mackerel. Despite stark warnings from scientists on the state of the stock, negotiations in Clonakilty reached an impasse.

Over the last two days, representatives of the SIA attended the Coastal States negotiations involving the EU, UK, Norway, Faroes, Iceland and Greenland. The talks aimed to agree on how mackerel catches would be shared from 2026 onwards. But while the scientific body ICES has issued dire warnings about the state of the stock, no agreement was reached. Parties remained entrenched in their positions, despite strong efforts by the EU to inject urgency into the process.

The SIA, who attended the negotiations as observers, welcomed the EU's firm stance in the talks. They said the EU delegation were the only party demonstrating a sense of urgency by calling for immediate agreement on measures to reduce fishing pressure. Patrick Murphy, chair of the ISWFPO, said the EU was right to call this an emergency. "We need an immediate, unified and responsible approach by all parties if the stock is to recover. Other parties, particularly Norway, seem in denial on the state of the stock, despite consistent scientific warnings to the contrary.

Norway, the Faroes and the UK rejected alternative proposals put forward by the chair for a short-term sharing arrangement as part of a recovery package. Instead, they pushed for a counterproposal that locks in inflated unilateral quotas, said the SIA. As part of this counterproposal, Norway and the Faroes would transfer part of their share to the UK, to maintain access to fish in UK waters.

Aodh O'Donnell of the IFPO said the so-called trilateral agreement was nothing more than a quota grab. "They present it as responsible, but in reality, it simply justifies consistent overfishing. That's the truth our industry is living with."

The EU also pressed for limits on Russian vessels fishing in international waters during the summer months. This year saw a surge in Russian effort, but with little or no monitoring of their catches. Dominic Rihan of the KFO said the scale of Russian activity is deeply worrying. "Their catching and freezing capacity far exceeds sustainable levels, yet we have almost no accurate figures on what they catch. The EU is right to raise the alarm. Claims by others that this is an exaggeration are simply preposterous."

The SIA left Clonakilty with growing frustration at the lack of urgency and denial about the scale of the crisis. "Huge profits from overfishing have blinded some industries to reality," said Aodh O'Donnell. "Meanwhile our fleet is facing bankruptcy next year without EU and Government support."

Talks will resume in October, when the full extent of proposed scientific cuts will be known. The SIA hopes that by then, the stark figures may act as a catalyst for meaningful action.

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

Seafood Ireland was formed in 2024 and is an alliance of five fishing and processing bodies. These are the Irish Fish Producers Organisation (IFPO), the Killybegs Fishermen's Organisation (KFO), the Irish South & West Fish Producer's Organisation (IS&WFPO), the Irish South & East Fish Producers Organisation (IS&EFPO) and the Irish Fish Processors & Exporters Association (IFPEA). The organisations are committed to working together to strengthen the voice of the Irish fishing industry.