

## EU Commissioner Urged to act on Seafood Sector Crisis

The Seafood Ireland Alliance (SIA) has pressed EU Fisheries Commissioner Costas Kadis for urgent action to address the escalating crisis facing Ireland's fishing fleet, processors and service industries.

SIA members met online with Commissioner Kadis on Thursday (12 February 2026), alongside Fine Gael's Maria Walsh MEP and Senators Manus Boyle and Noel Donovan, who arranged and attended the meeting. The Alliance expressed its appreciation for the Commissioner's time and engagement at what it described as a critical moment for the sector.

The discussion centred on the severe resilience challenges facing fleets. **Brendan Byrne** of the Irish Fish Processors and Exporters Association said this included a focus on processing facilities and associated marine service industries, following major quota reductions for 2026, and continuing instability in key shared stocks.

Latest projections indicate potential first point of sale losses of €94 million with the loss of an additional €18 million in the failure for the EU to deliver Hague Preferences. It is feared that more than 2,300 full-time equivalent job losses if mitigating measures are not introduced.

**Aodh O'Donnell**, of the Irish Fish Producers Organisation (IFPO), said the situation requires decisive political leadership.

"The Irish seafood sector is under extreme pressure. The scale of quota cuts, combined with long-standing imbalances in shared stocks, is now threatening the viability of fleets, processors and the communities that depend on them. We need urgent, practical intervention at EU level."

A central issue raised was the EU's failure to invoke the Hague Preferences mechanism in response to severe quota reductions. The Alliance argued that this safeguard is designed precisely for moments such as this and should be reinstated without delay.

Mackerel was also highlighted as a defining concern. Ireland remains the largest EU quota holder of Western mackerel, yet unilateral quota-setting by non-EU coastal states continues to distort the level playing field.

"Irish and EU vessels have consistently adhered to scientific advice," O'Donnell said. "But sustainability must apply equally to all. Securing a genuine level playing field on mackerel quotas is essential for the credibility of fisheries governance and the survival of our pelagic sector."

Commissioner Kadis indicated that the mackerel level playing field issue is being addressed in bilateral processes with other coastal states and at the highest political levels. The Alliance welcomed this confirmation and stressed the need for tangible outcomes.

The meeting also examined the harmonised and realistic implementation of the new EU Control Regulation. SIA emphasised that practical application must reflect operational realities at sea and onshore and must not impose disproportionate burdens on compliant fleets. The Commissioner confirmed that a further meeting with EU industry representatives will take place to address implementation issues.

The Alliance underlined the urgent need for transitional measures and targeted economic supports to allow the sector to adapt to the cumulative impact of quota reductions, Brexit-

related losses and regulatory change. Fleet restructuring options, emergency financial assistance and a comprehensive socio-economic impact assessment were discussed as part of a broader resilience strategy.

SIA members participating in the meeting included Dr Edward Farrell of the Killybegs Fishermen's Organisation, Brendan Byrne of the Irish Fish Processors and Exporters Association, Patrick Murphy of the Irish South and West Fish Producers Organisation, John Lynch of the Irish South and East Fish Producers Organisation, and Aodh O'Donnell of the Irish Fish Producers Organisation.

The Alliance acknowledged the constructive role played by Maria Walsh MEP and Senators Manus Boyle and Noel Donovan in facilitating the engagement and advancing the sector's concerns at European level.

"Our message is clear," O'Donnell concluded. "Irish fishers are prepared to adapt and operate sustainably. But they cannot continue to absorb disproportionate economic losses while others benefit. Europe must now act to restore fairness, resilience and confidence in the future of our seafood sector."

The Seafood Ireland Alliance reaffirmed its commitment to continued engagement with the Commission and Member States to secure a viable and sustainable future for Ireland's fishing industry.

**ENDS**