
The Northern Ireland Marine Task Force (NIMTF) is a coalition of non-government environmental organisations – it includes RSPB, Ulster Wildlife, Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, WWF, National Trust, Friends of the Earth, Irish Whale and Dolphin Group, and Northern Ireland Environment Link.

NORTHERN IRELAND MARINE TASK FORCE EVIDENCE ON FISHERIES BILL – CLAUSE 6

The Northern Ireland Marine Task Force (NIMTF) responded to the Consultation on Policy Proposals for a Fisheries Bill in August 2014. NIMTF is working towards ‘healthy, productive and resilient seas in Northern Ireland’ and view the process of amending the Fisheries Act (NI) 1981 and Sea Fish (Conservation) Act 1967 as an opportunity to protect Northern Irish seas as well as ensuring the long term cultural and economic sustainability of the Northern Ireland fishing industry.

This paper outlines the NIMTF response on Clause 6 – ‘Enforcement of EU rules’ and the need for a sustainable fishing industry in Northern Ireland.

Enforcement of EU Rules

NIMTF supports the implementation of Clause 6 within the proposed amendments to the Fisheries Bill. NIMTF also acknowledges the need to proceed with implementation of Clause 6 due to the pilot case opened by the EU Commission in 2015 and the associated threat of infringement proceedings. Clause 6 provides the Department with powers to enforce most EU fisheries legislation as soon as the regulation comes into effect. It is a legal obligation for EU Member States to implement in full EU Regulations and Directives. There is no discretion on this matter and this obligation is reflected in domestic NI primary legislation. Clause 6 therefore embeds this requirement within the Fisheries Bill.

Implementing Clause 6 will also bring Northern Ireland in line with England, Wales and Scotland, thereby ensuring the UK adopts a standardised approach to EU compliance.

Need for sustainable fisheries in Northern Ireland

Recent reforms to the EU Common Fisheries Policy are intended to ensure the sustainability of the EU's fishing industry by managing fish stocks as a shared resource. A sustainable commercial fishing industry is vital to ensure our fragile marine environments are protected and that fish stocks remain healthy and productive into the future.

Furthermore, this will contribute to the achievement of 'Good Environmental Status' (GES) for the marine environment; a requirement of the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD). Two MSFD Descriptors explicitly refer to aspects of the commercial fishing industry:

Descriptor 3: Commercially Exploited Fish and Shellfish – Populations of commercially exploited fish and shellfish are within safe biological limits, exhibiting a population age and size distribution that is indicative of a healthy stock;

and

Descriptor 9: Contaminants in Fish and Seafood – Contaminants in fish and other seafood for human consumption do not exceed levels established by Community legislation or other relevant standards.

In addition, a number of other Descriptors rely on an effective management of commercial fishing activities in order to achieve GES.

The requirements of MSFD, along with the Marine Planning process in Northern Ireland, reflect a wider connection between commercial fisheries, aquaculture and marine conservation; the needs of commercial fishing and the health/wellbeing of the marine environment are inextricably linked.

NIMTF is campaigning for a sustainable, well-managed and environmentally sensitive fishing industry in Northern Ireland supported through the implementation of effective legislation. We therefore support the proposal to pass Clause 6 of the Fisheries Bill as a key step in this process. We would suggest that consideration is given as to how the European Fisheries Fund can be used to help the industry adapt to this new operating environment to achieve a sustainable future e.g. funding of satellite trackers, selective fishing gear, research and education.

If you have any queries on the comments made on behalf of NIMTF, please do not hesitate to contact:

Rebecca Hunter
Northern Ireland Marine Task Force (NIMTF)
info@nimtf.org
028 9046 3129