

## **NIFPO WRITTEN COMMENTS ON FISHERIES BILL UPDATE**

NIFPO welcomed the concept of a Fisheries Bill and was largely content with its initial draft in that we had no major criticisms to offer and considered it on the whole advantageous to the NI industry. Whilst not perfect we considered it workable, fair and fit for purpose. It is with some disappointment that we observe the Lord's amendments have not added value to the Bill but instead raise significant concerns.

**Sustainability Objective** - Lord Krebs' amend is universally opposed by the significant UK industry bodies including NIFPO. We concur with UK government's assessment that there should be no hierarchy of objectives however until such time as the effectiveness of Joint Fisheries Statements (JFS) can be gauged we reserve judgment on whether that is indeed the best place for the objectives to be applied.

Environmental sustainability is one of the pillars the fishing industry is built on. Without it the industry would have disappeared decades ago. NIFPO fully supports and is indeed reliant on responsible, sustainable management of the marine environment. We are aware however that not all share our view that fishing and conservation can have a positive and symbiotic relationship. By placing environmental conservation as the prime directive it presents an opportunity for those with more extreme views to implement legal challenges against both UK and NI's imposition of management measures. We are concerned that this could significantly disrupt fishing operations and potentially force severe negative outcomes on the fishing communities our industry supports.

**National Landing Requirement** - There has been significant and chronic concern in industry surrounding UK flagged vessels with non UK beneficial owners catching fish in UK waters and landing them abroad. This provides little economic benefit to the UK and makes it more difficult for UK authorities to verify that illegal, unregulated or unreported (IUU) fishing is not taking place as they cannot conduct physical landing checks on the quayside.

There are a small number of economically significant NI vessels for whom, as a result of their usual fishing grounds being inside RoI's EEZ, it is beneficial to land into RoI ports. We would prefer this continue but recognise it will be subject to access agreements post EU exit. In NIFPO's assessment this amend is well meaning in that it aims to prevent exploitation of UK's fish stocks by flagships, but noting that NIA need only be consulted this amend remains too blunt an instrument to solve the problem without risking collateral damage to NI vessels. As such we cannot support this amend.

**Remote Electronic Monitoring** - The call for remote electronic monitoring, in effect the placing of cameras and recording equipment on fishing vessels has been made by some elements of the environmental lobby for since the inception of the Landings Obligation.

Both AFBI and CEFAS (AFBI's English counterparts) fisheries scientists have stated that the current observer program is sufficient, and in many cases more reliable (as a camera observer has a severely compromised ability to distinguish between species of similar fish) at highlighting the possibility of discarding as a practice. In short the observers physically verify the quantity and variety of fish caught across a number of vessels and time periods. This allows them to build a model of what any particular vessel's catch should look like. Significant deviation from this model is a strong indicator that there are areas for deeper investigation.

Observers witness every fish landed and can see it recorded contemporaneously in a vessel's logbook. For a cameras to achieve the same level of assurance they would need to cover every area of the upper deck, fish hold, hopper, conveyor belts and working deck. Infra red cameras would detect fish being discarded at night but would be unable to distinguish between species which were legal to discard and those which weren't.

The WWF commissioned a study which showed the whole of the UK fleet being brought into a REM regime at a cost of £5M. In NIFPO's assessment (based on reading their work and interviewing the authors) that figure is a gross underestimate designed to help the policy gain political traction. We estimate that a robust REM regime would require £60M in its first year alone. This money would be spent to enforce compliance with the landings obligation and be almost completely ineffective in doing so. Given the pressure public spending is likely to be under for the foreseeable future NIFPO fear a significant proportion of the cost would be thrust upon vessel owners. We are concerned that many NI vessels do not have the economic returns enjoyed elsewhere in the UK and there is a subsequent risk of a disproportionate impact to NI. In any event there is no reasonable argument to spend significant sums of money on a system that is clearly worse than which already exists.

The use of REM for the purposes of recording where vessels are fishing (by satellite tracking) is more reasonable. There are arguments to be made in support both for vessel safety and compiling the best possible data on fisheries science. Our main concern would be that smaller vessels may struggle to meet the cost of implementation.

For the above reasons we endorse UK government's rejection of this amend.

**MCAA Amend** – DAERA and the NI fishing industry have a history of being able to reach mutually positive outcomes on marine conservation issues in our inshore waters. Unfortunately for our offshore waters our relationship with DEFRA on conservation issues hasn't been successful. In our assessment this UK government has taken a one size fits all, feel the width and never mind the quality, approach to

marine conservation which we feel disenfranchises NI stakeholders and does not result in the level of management our waters deserve. This amend gives NI the chance to devolve offshore management measures to DAERA and see the job done properly. NIFPO assess that the UK government's next round of conservation measures (Highly Protected Marine Areas) will be implemented in NI's offshore waters with the same ineffective and counterproductive approach. If we wish to avoid this outcome and extend the gold standard of DAERA's inshore waters management regime then the importance of this amend being both tabled and adopted cannot be overstated.

### **Reservation of English Fishing Opportunities For New Entrants and Boats Under 10m**

The fact that as drafted this would see quota taken from the UK's quota (including NI's) and allocated to English vessels means it is not in NI's interest to support this amend.

Even if the drafting was amended to closer reflect what we believe was the original intent of transferring quota between English vessels NIFPO support the UK Government's assessment that this amendment would not achieve the objectives.

As a cautionary note there is significant acrimony between the English sector (quota holders) and non sector (non quota holders) over fishing opportunity. That is not the case in NI. Both local producer organisations have, when needed, gifted quota to the non sector so they might keep fishing when they otherwise would have had to limit their effort. Any introduction of a similar measure in NI to what the Lords have proposed here would be a threat to the pragmatic and harmonious relationship we enjoy with the non sector.

**Other Amends –** The remaining amends are all supported and not considered to warrant significant debate. They are either sensible or uncontroversial measures.

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