

Northern Ireland Assembly Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

UK Government Fisheries Bill

Submission by: Northern Ireland Fishery Harbour Authority

28th February 2020

1. Introduction:

1.1 The Northern Ireland Fishery Harbour Authority (the Authority) is an executive Non-Departmental Public Body sponsored by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) and constituted under the Harbours Act (Northern Ireland) 1970 and the Northern Ireland Fishery Harbour Authority Order (Northern Ireland) 1973.

1.2 The Authority's primary functions are summarised as follows: -

- to improve, manage and maintain the three fishery harbours and harbour estates of Ardglass, Kilkeel and Portavogie;
- to operate such facilities as may be provided at the harbours;
- to dredge and maintain the harbour berths, channels and entrances;
- to lease, dispose of or develop land vested in the Authority; and
- to construct, alter or extend any tidal work (subject to regulatory consent).

The Authority is primarily responsible for ensuring that all onshore and marine activities within harbour limits are carried out safely and efficiently and that harbour facilities are maintained and improved in an effective manner.

2. Representation

2.1 Kevin Quigley will be the sole Authority representative attending the committee meeting he has been the Chief Executive since September 2012.

3. Overview

3.1 The Authority does not propret to have any expertise in the area of the management of fisheries, this is outside of its normal remit and it is content to rely on briefings from DAERA personnel and it also values input from both the Fishermen's representative organisations namely ANIFPO and NIFPO.

3.2 That said the Authority is pleased that it has been invited to provide a briefing.

3.3 The main purpose of the bill is to provide both central government and devolved administrations the authority to manage the fisheries in the UK EEZ. It appears both in structure and content that this goal has been achieved.

4. Objectives

4.1 There are eight objectives outlined in the bill. These are all important and the detail provided for each objective is relevant. The Authority supports all eight objectives. It particularly welcomes the inclusion of a climate change objective. This is because it is increasingly concerned that climate change appears to be quickening and it is concerned that there is a possibility of significant negative impacts for the industry.

4.2 To the Authority the reading of the by catch objective (page 2 (6)) would suggest that all bycatch is below minimum conservation size. This is not the case bycatch can include valuable species that are not the intended catch.

5. Joint Fisheries Statement

5.1 The Authority welcomes the requirement to produce a joint fisheries statement. This is because it believes this will assist in providing clarity to stakeholders across the United Kingdom as to how fisheries will be managed.

6. Management plans

6.1 There is a requirement to use and develop fishery management plans. This an already established approach and the Authority views this as a sensible approach to achieving the goal of balanced sustainable fisheries.

7. Enhanced Quota

7.1 The likely outcome of the exit negotiations will be enhanced quota for the UK. The Northern Ireland fleet has a well-established pattern of fishing throughout UK waters not just those that would fall under Northern Ireland's control. A fair way of allocation this increase in quota must be established to ensure Northern Ireland's fishermen have fair access to this improvement.

8. Financial Assistance

8.1 While the Authority is operationally self-financing it relies heavily on capital grants to both maintain and improve its harbour infrastructure. It therefore welcomes powers given both to the Secretary of State Page 24, 36(1)(a) and to the Northern Ireland Department Page 71, 3(1)(a) to give financial assistance for the conservation, enhancement or restoration of the marine and aquatic environment.

9. End of Life Vessels

9.1 The principle of the polluter pays is well established yet there is currently no legislation which controls the disposal of end of life fishing vessels. Unfortunately, this has led to a situation where several fishing vessels have been abandoned in the Authority's harbours. This ongoing problem is generating a significant financial risk to the Authority and ultimately the

Northern Ireland taxpayer as the Authority does not have sufficient funds to become the funder of the disposal of these vessels. The Authority recognises that this may be more appropriately dealt with through the Environment Bill which the committee will in due course address. The Authority would welcome an invitation to present to the committee on this issue when it is reviewing the Environment Bill.