

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Fisheries negotiations outcome, HC 1061

Wednesday 2 February 2022

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Members present: Neil Parish (Chair); Kirsty Blackman; Ian Byrne; Geraint Davies; Rosie Duffield; Barry Gardiner; Dr Neil Hudson; Robbie Moore; Mrs Sheryll Murray.

Questions 1 - 85

Witnesses

[I:](#) Victoria Prentis MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; Mike Dowell, Deputy Director for EU Fisheries Negotiations and Policy, DEFRA; Colin Faulkner, Deputy Director, External Fisheries Negotiations and Trade Policy, DEFRA.



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Victoria Prentis, Mike Dowell and Colin Faulkner.

Q1 **Chair:** Welcome to the EFRA Select Committee. We are delighted to have our Fishing Minister with us this afternoon to discuss the negotiations and the final agreements. Just very quickly, all three, please introduce yourselves for the record.

Victoria Prentis: Hello. I am Victoria Prentis, the Fisheries Minister.

Mike Dowell: Good afternoon. I am Mike Dowell, deputy director, EU fisheries negotiations and policy.

Colin Faulkner: I am Colin Faulkner, deputy director in Defra for external fisheries negotiation and trade policy.

Q2 **Chair:** As agreed, Minister, you are going to give us a presentation for approximately 10 minutes, and then we will go into questions.

Victoria Prentis: If it is alright with you, Mr Chairman, I will go through these slides very briefly, but do feel free to ask questions as we go through them, because questions may well arise during the nip through the slides.

Chair: The slide pack is also available on the Committee's website and Twitter account, if anyone watching the session wishes to follow.

Victoria Prentis: I have some slides about negotiations that I was going to start with. I was going to leave the ones on funding for later, if that suits you. I will be guided entirely by you as to what you want to do when.

Chair: If you would like to get through as much as you can in the 10 minutes, then we will see where we go from there.

Victoria Prentis: On negotiations, to start with—we can definitely get on to funding later—last time I came to see you, we had not quite concluded our fisheries negotiations. We were very keen, as you know, to do that, so that we could give our fishing industry some level of certainty as to what it would be able to fish this year. I am very pleased to say—and I wrote to the Committee on Christmas eve—that we were able to conclude bilateral and trilateral fisheries negotiations with the EU and Norway, with the wider coastal states and with various RFMOs.

We have not quite concluded negotiations with the Faroes, although it is, I am told, so imminent that we have a comms plan. The reason for that delay is that the Faroese Government had a change of personnel over the period.

On the first slide, you can see that our aims were to deliver sustainability improvements, to support the fishing industry and to continue to realise the benefits derived from being an independent coastal state. We took a



team UK approach and involved colleagues from the DAs, and we are very pleased that we got what we consider to be a balanced outcome for all parts of the UK. An assessment of the number of individual TACs will be published in the next few weeks, once the Cefas scientists have done their work.

Turning to the slide on UK-EU bilateral negotiations, which is number 2 in your pack, negotiations began on 11 November and concluded on 21 December. It was the second year in which we had participated in negotiations. The tone was much better this time. It was positive, constructive and very frank. It gives our industry stability. We got 140,000 tonnes of fishing opportunities. This is slightly down on the previous year, because of the scientific advice. As you will know, because you have been involved in this for some years now, the scientific advice can go down as well as up, and we have to react to that.

Having said that, you will see from the bottom section of that slide that TACs were set slightly lower in 2022 as compared with the previous year, because of the scientific advice. Forty-six per cent. were reduced, 22% were increased and 32% were at the same level. We are not yet fishing entirely sustainably, but we are definitely moving in that direction. Given the turmoil in the industry over recent years, I thought that that was a fair and proportionate outcome to those negotiations.

The next slide gives some flesh on the bones of the UK-EU negotiations. In the Celtic sea and Bristol channel, we are continuing to consider mixed fishery interactions. We still need to do further work on skates and rays. In the North sea west of Scotland, greater sustainability is definitely still needed, particularly with cod, which we can come on to, if necessary. It is positive that the condition and outlook for west of Scotland whiting is starting to get better, and it is very similar in the Irish sea.

Non-quota stocks are stocks for which we do not have data, because we have not collected or shared that data in the past. We have made significant progress in agreeing with the EU that we are going to swap monthly data with them, and I hope that we did it for January; I will check. After a certain number of months—Mike can come in to give the details in a minute—we are going to set up a proper multi-year strategy, but we have to do that on the basis of some data. These are really valuable stocks. I can go into more detail later about that if you want me to.

Critically for the fishing industry, we agreed to continue the interim quota swaps, which was a real win.

Q3 Mrs Murray: Fishermen in area 7, in particular, rely quite heavily on non-quota stocks and the fact that they are not subjected to restrictions, particularly on lemon sole and fast-growing species like squid. How are you addressing that? It would be really concerning to me if some of the fishermen from my constituency, for instance, suddenly saw their income restricted because we are now moving from non-pressure stocks to



pressure stock.

Victoria Prentis: In order to move towards a position of sustainable fishing, we need to know what is going on. Because of their very nature, we have not done that with non-quota stocks. I completely agree that these are some of our most valuable fisheries, but it is particularly important for that reason that we make sure that we manage them sustainably, so that there will be enough for future years.

What we are doing at the moment is collecting really robust data. We are going to share that with the EU. We have agreed not to take any action this year. Having said that, tonnages were agreed in the TCA. We have come to an understanding this year with the EU that, when we reach 80% of that figure, we will have a proper, formal discussion with it and decide what to do next.

Q4 **Mrs Murray:** It is certainly in the fishermen's interest to record or estimate all of their catches using the catch app.

Victoria Prentis: It really is; otherwise we cannot know what is caught and then we are not in a position to argue on their behalf. I could not agree more.

Going back to the slide, quota swaps are carrying on as is for the moment. It is possible that, in the future, we might get a more technical way of doing it but, at the moment, the quota swaps are working well.

The next slide is about UK-EU bilateral negotiations and the Specialised Committee on Fisheries. We will continue to work with this. We had two meetings last year. I will not rehearse the slide, but it sets out our priorities for this next year. It says what I just said about non-quota stocks and tonnage limits.

Moving on to the UK-EU-Norway trilaterals, Colin is the expert on this, so you can ask him for the details. We signed a trilateral agreement on catch limits on six jointly managed stocks in the North sea. We chaired the talks. Five of the six catch levels were within scientific advice, which is progress. We are going to focus work on hake and herring this year. We were very pleased with that outcome.

In December, we signed a bilateral agreement with Norway, which covers access, quota, control and enforcement. We were particularly pleased with this very balanced package, which ensures priority access for both parties and, from our point of view, delivers a really very large reduction in Norwegian vessels' access to our waters compared to when we were a member of the EU.

It is worth a great deal of money to us. We work particularly closely with the Norwegians. We will hold formal quarterly meetings with them and closely monitor all fishing activity. They are very much of our mind with regard to sustainable fishing, and it is fair to say that Colin probably talks to his counterpart there at least a couple of times a week. We also



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concluded a Svalbard agreement, which is very important to one area of our fleet, as you know.

The first round of UK-Faroes negotiations took place in November. This has been very slow, but for understandable reasons, as the Government in the Faroe Islands changed. The consultations concerned quota exchange and control of enforcement. Both sides have worked well together and I will write to you as soon as the deal is concluded, unless it is in the next half an hour, in which case we will let you know.

Chair: Hot off the press, yes.

Victoria Prentis: This is the final slide on negotiations, because I do not want to take up the time. These are coastal state negotiations that start next week—not all negotiations take place before Christmas. In this, we are acting as an independent coastal state for the following really important stocks: mackerel, ASH and blue whiting. We are chairing the negotiations, which is good news. The negotiations start next week and carry on until about May. We have agreed the global TACs. The problem is that, unless we sort out a sharing agreement, everybody thinks they can fish up to the global TACs, so it is really important that we get this right and I really want to put a bit of welly into chairing those negotiations.

The final slide on negotiations is about the regional fisheries management organisations, which we talked to you about last time. It is really important that we are playing our part in marine management around the world. You probably do not want to go into enormous detail now, but I am always happy to come and do a special session on it.

Chair: We can deal with the UK seafood fund and others as we get to questions.

Victoria Prentis: That is fine.

Q5 **Chair:** Thank you very much, Minister, for going through that. In terms of my first question, you have done some of this already. Can you summarise the assessment of the overall outcome across the UK's international negotiations concerning the fishing opportunities? Who are the winners and who are the losers?

Victoria Prentis: The first point is that it is good for everyone, because we have certainty. We all learned last year that that is not a done deal, so we were all relieved to get sensible, balanced deals across the board, frankly. That is good for the whole industry.

In sustainability terms, which we have to think of as well, it was fair. It is not everything but we are making progress towards sustainability and continue to do that, which is important.

In terms of fairness for different parts of the UK, we have tried very hard and have achieved something that is fairly balanced. I do not know if



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there is a way of measuring that, except that the industry's reaction was also fairly balanced, which I take as a plus.

Q6 Chair: There is always an issue with fishing, in that fishermen always believe that there are many more fish there to be caught and wonder why they cannot catch them. ICES spends its time saying that stocks are under huge pressure. How do you balance that through the negotiations? I always find that the most difficult one of all.

Victoria Prentis: Do you want to talk to the gentlemen who do most of the negotiations? We have the ICES advice.

Q7 Chair: My question is a very broad one to give us an overall impression. We want to be able to maintain fishing quotas and access, but we also have to be conscious of the sustainability of stocks. That is the issue.

Mike Dowell: To give a couple of examples, cod is a key vulnerable species that is often talked about. If we take cod in the Celtic sea and the west of Scotland, the advice that we get from the international committees is to catch no cod whatsoever, but that is clearly not pragmatic.

Chair: We are getting into question 2 on the cod side, but I understand.

Mike Dowell: It is just an example of how we would balance the fact that the advice in that case is for no catch. Even if it is a very deep cut, we work with the various industry players involved in that fishery and work out what is a pragmatic amount of bycatch, for instance, for that vulnerable stock, so that we do not choke out the fishery. That is a bit of a jargon. That is so that we do not stop fishers from targeting the stocks that they do want to catch, because of particularly vulnerable stocks.

Q8 Chair: This is very much in the mixed fisheries, is it not?

Mike Dowell: Very much in the mixed fisheries, yes.

Q9 Chair: The south-west fishery is a very mixed one. Colin, would you like to add anything else?

Colin Faulkner: I would be happy to. The point I would make is that the vast majority of the industry recognises that sustainability is in its interests as well. I would not quite characterise it as the industry constantly pushing for more quotas at the expense of the science. Industry has, broadly speaking, evolved significantly and is very much in the space of recognising that a profitable business requires a sustainable source of fish stocks to keep it going. It is not quite that stand-off between industry and science, or I do not see that to the extent that perhaps we may have seen a couple of decades ago. It is much more of a symbiotic relationship.

Chair: One of the drawbacks of the CFP was always that our fishermen thought that, if they saved the fish, somebody else would come and catch it, if you see what I mean. We should be able to get that in a better



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place, but we have detailed questions on policing and everything else in a minute.

- Q10 **Mrs Murray:** I know that there was sometimes a reluctance for the fishers on the ground to engage with the scientists. My late husband used to. He would take scientists out on his boat, so they could see what was being caught. Has that improved? Are fishermen now prepared to accept the scientific assessment more readily?

Does independent coastal status give us the opportunity, where you suddenly have an influx of haddock in the North sea? In the past, we have had very little quota. The EU was such a cumbersome movement. Under the CFP, you could not adapt the quotas to meet what the fishermen were seeing on the ground. As an independent coastal state, one would presume that we can introduce or relax restrictions as necessary. Is this the case?

Victoria Prentis: Broadly, yes. On the stocks that we have come to an agreement on, not necessarily, although it is true to say that we do not fish up to our quota on a lot of those, so there is a certain amount of flexibility.

On the relationship between ICES and the fishing industry, I agree that it is much better than it was. There is a real respect on both sides, which is not to say that it is always absolutely accurate. Fishery science is very difficult here. Fish move. The ICES scientists do their best but, with the best will in the world, sometimes the situation changes.

- Q11 **Geraint Davies:** Minister, you have talked about the importance of sustainability, but am I right that what has been agreed now is in the highly vulnerable west of Scotland and Celtic sea, where cod stocks are at dire risk?

Victoria Prentis: The ICES advice for cod stocks in the west of Scotland and the Celtic sea was zero. This is an important mixed fishery for us, so it is impossible for anybody to fish if we do not let them have the occasional cod caught up as bycatch. This is an unfortunate reality and is why we take advice from the scientists but then have to do agreements. It is the way it works.

What we have agreed is a very small quota to enable us to carry on fishing in that area. There are other stocks that are really valuable to our fishing industry in those seas. Something else that we could come back to talk about another day is that we have a cod avoidance plan, which is to do with types of gear and whole areas of the sea being closed to fishing. This is very much operational in that area. Do you want to come in on that, Colin?

Colin Faulkner: We have a whole range of measures particularly around gear and fishing nets of particular sizes to try to avoid cod wherever we possibly can in any of the sea areas around the UK. We have a UK



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national cod avoidance plan, primarily in the North sea, but many of the measures from that will have applicability elsewhere.

Those include things like closing off waters in UK seas when fishermen come across a large abundance of cod, for example. It is called the real time closure system. That area might be closed for three weeks at a time. Similarly, we have seasonal closures as well, particularly when the fish might be spawning. There are whole variety of gear measures and spatial measures that we put in place to try to protect cod as well as setting TACs in a way that reduces pressure on North sea cod across all areas.

Chair: Total allowable catch—I am aware that we talk in lots of abbreviations.

Q12 **Geraint Davies:** You accept that we are in dire straits in terms of cod. We are doing what we can to stop people catching them, but is it properly policed to ensure that, if there is a sudden shoal of cod, someone does not just take them up? Can you give us that guarantee?

Victoria Prentis: We have a range of measures in place to try to ensure that fishermen catch what they are allowed to. The fishing industry is very aware of and quite sympathetic to our cod avoidance measures, and is willing to work with us on this.

Q13 **Geraint Davies:** There is also a sustainability problem in the north-east Atlantic with mackerel, herring and blue herring. We do not have an agreement on quota sharing there, do we?

Victoria Prentis: That is what I was talking about earlier. That is the coastal states agreement that we will start to negotiate next week. They have agreed a TAC but we have not yet agreed the shares that each nation is going to fish. It is really critical that we do that; otherwise everybody fishes up to the upper limit and ends up overfishing. Colin will be taking forward, as chair, those negotiations as of next week, with the other coastal states involved.

Q14 **Geraint Davies:** Assuming it is agreed, when would it be implemented?

Victoria Prentis: It is normally concluded about May or perhaps early June. That is fine, because we fish in January and February, but we do not fish anything like our quota. We fish about half in January and February. The other nations involved do not start fishing those stocks, because they do not appear in their waters until much later in the year. This is a normal timescale for it and we are quite relaxed.

Q15 **Geraint Davies:** So you are providing assurances that, between now and June, there will not be a free for all, where everyone comes in and takes all the vulnerable species.

Colin Faulkner: The quota levels that other coastal states set are a matter for other coastal states. Last year, we were very clear that the increased quotas set by the likes of Norway and the Faroes were



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unacceptable. That is one reason why we are extremely keen to have a really intensive series of negotiations from March onwards until the end of May, in order to get the quota sharing arrangements back in place. They need to be back in place. There is significant retailer and processor pressure to make that happen, but also significant sustainability concerns if that is not put back in place.

Q16 Barry Gardiner: Minister, cuttlefish, red mullet and turbot are just a few of the stocks that are hugely important to our fleets, and particularly to small-scale fishermen. There is a new fleet of EU fly-shooters that have been licensed post-Brexit. They are particularly proficient at catching non-quota stocks. That is new effort. What are you doing to control the amount of non-quota stock that EU boats are catching in UK waters? Are you getting any real time, daily data on what they are catching?

Victoria Prentis: The problem with non-quota stocks, as I explained earlier, is that we do not have data, because they have been and still are non-quota stocks.

Q17 Barry Gardiner: That is why I asked the last question about what daily data you are in receipt of.

Victoria Prentis: As I said earlier, we now have much better data collection and we have committed, with the EU, to exchange that data monthly. We hope that we will then be in a position to make a proper multi-annual agreement with the EU. It is not a total free for all at the moment. There are tonnage limits within the TCA. What we have agreed is that, when we get to 80% of that baseline, we will have a proper discussion with the EU, but given the valuability of these stocks and their importance to fleets on both sides of the channel, we chose not to try to make an agreement without sufficient data for this year.

We will preserve the bottom line and, when we get to 80%, we will have a discussion if we need to. Otherwise, we are, at the moment, in the data-sharing space and we hope, by the middle of this year, to be in a position to agree a step forward.

Q18 Barry Gardiner: How are you getting real-time data on a daily basis?

Mike Dowell: I am happy to pick that up. The data that is recorded for non-quota stock landings on the EU side will be recorded by the relevant member state authorities. It is then summed up and the data exchange happens between us and the Commission. That is why it will not happen daily. It is done on a monthly basis. It would be the same going in the other direction. We would sum it at the UK level.

Q19 Barry Gardiner: You would share it on a monthly basis but you can assure the Committee that it is being gathered on a daily basis.

Mike Dowell: Yes, anything that is landed.

Barry Gardiner: Whenever it is landed.



Mike Dowell: Whenever it is landed at quayside, yes.

Q20 **Barry Gardiner:** In relation to the fact that this is new effort, what is your estimation of how substantial that is?

Victoria Prentis: You have the data to date. Some of it is new effort and some of it is not, truthfully.

Q21 **Barry Gardiner:** I am asking what the element of new effort is that you are allowing the EU to catch in UK waters.

Mike Dowell: I would not have a calculation of the anticipated effort, but what we would be able to do is to see if the trajectory of the EU catch in UK waters is moving more quickly than it did, for instance, last year, towards its limit, because it now has a baseline.

Q22 **Barry Gardiner:** Is that something that you would be able to write to the Committee on?

Victoria Prentis: There is a limit on non-quota stock. Do not worry about that. That is absolutely baked in to the agreement. What we have to do is to make sure that we have sufficient data as to exactly what is being caught, so that we can inform.

Q23 **Barry Gardiner:** I understand that. What I am trying to establish is what the new effort is that is coming in from the EU to take those stocks from UK waters.

Minister, if I can move on, in 2020 there was a series of parliamentary questions put down by my colleague, who was then Shadow Secretary of State on our side. The answers that you gave confirmed that, for vessels over 10 metres, the catch data submitted was compliant with the regulatory 10% margin of tolerance only about 40% of the time. When it was wrong, it could be wrong by as much as 116% on the groups of stocks that were being asked about. Why is that? What have you done to address it? The actual figures were between—I am just looking for them now—56% and 64% of vessels submitting logbook data.

Chair: Are you asking about the catch app?

Barry Gardiner: Yes.

Victoria Prentis: I have a slide towards the end of the pack that deals with the catch app. The law is changing and this is a matter that which the hon. Member for Plymouth takes a close interest in. I do not know if you can find this part of your pack called “catch app”. It is towards the back of the slide pack.

The law in this area is developing. This is why I wanted to make quite sure that the Committee understood this. This is catch recording, which is what Mrs Murray and I were talking about earlier, for vessels under 10 metres. It was introduced in November 2019. We have always been very pleased with it in Government, because it gives us real-time data, which is what we want, but it was not obligatory.



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As this slide explains, vessel master are required to submit a catch record for every trip they undertake. This shows that 88% of the under-10s have signed up for it. Compliance was variable. Sixty-nine per cent. were regularly supplying us with data. We said that the MMO will be moving to enforcing this from the end of February this year, so very shortly. The MMO is now engaging with industry face to face to try to encourage and support, and to make sure that this data is recorded properly. I hope that that is of some use to you.

Q24 Barry Gardiner: Not really. I wanted to ask you further about the roll-out of the catch app in a moment. What I am getting at here is the failure of regulatory compliance and what you are doing about that, and the huge variability.

Victoria Prentis: I do not think that I would describe it as failure at all. This is a major change for our small fishing fleet. We have tried to behave in a way that is proportionate and sensible and to bring this in slowly.

Q25 Barry Gardiner: You would not dispute, Minister, that there is a 10% margin of tolerance that is allowed in order to be compliant with the regulations.

Victoria Prentis: Yes, absolutely.

Q26 Barry Gardiner: That 10% margin of tolerance was achieved only about 40% of the time. In fact, between 56% and 64% of the time, it was not achieved. I am asking you why that is the case and, when it was wrong, I pointed out that it could vary by up to 116%. I am trying to establish why that was allowed to be the case and how you then worked to ensure compliance on those vessels that were not properly recording. We can then come on to the roll-out of the catch app.

Victoria Prentis: What I would say is that the MMO is working very closely and in real life with fishermen, monitoring the roll-out of this app. Where there is a considerable discrepancy, such as you described, they will be helping as well as engaging and ultimately enforcing the roll-out of this new system, which has been quite a change for the under-10 fleet.

Mrs Murray: Just to reassure you, Minister, I think what Mr Gardiner was trying to say was that fishermen—

Barry Gardiner: I am very able to say what I was trying to say myself, Sheryll, thank you.

Q27 Mrs Murray: On fishermen estimating their catch, I can tell you, having been married to a fisherman for 27 years, that, pre-catch app, he was very good at estimating the quantity of each species he caught and also at grading it. This is what fishermen do day to day.

Victoria Prentis: It is also how they make their money, of course, so I would agree with you.

Mrs Murray: Yes, absolutely. Moving on, the UK and the EU specialise—



Barry Gardiner: Excuse me, Chair. On a point of order, I cannot allow another member of the Committee to be countervailing the facts that I gave about regulatory compliance.

Mrs Murray: I withdraw my comment.

Barry Gardiner: Those were the questions that I put. It is absolutely vital that, instead of us having an argument across the Committee, the Minister answers about regulatory compliance. She has done so to the best of her ability. Whether it satisfies me or not is another matter. The last thing that the Committee needs is to have an argument across the floor of the Committee between members.

Chair: Listen. There is one person chairing this meeting, and that is me. I want to make that absolutely clear.

Mrs Murray: I am happy to withdraw.

Chair: Listen a moment. I am happy for you to withdraw. Mr Gardiner, you have a point, but you also know that there are exceptional circumstances regarding Mrs Murray. You know what those are and, therefore, if I have given extra leeway on this one, that is why I have done it. If you want to challenge me in the Chair, you are most welcome to, but I am chairing this meeting. Sheryll, will you carry on with your question and please stick to your question?

Mrs Murray: Thank you, Chairman. I do withdraw that. I would just ask for it to be minuted that I would like it recorded that there is an alternative view, and my experience shows that there is an alternative view. Mr Gardiner, I do apologise, but there is an alternative view.

Barry Gardiner: Apology accepted.

Q28 **Mrs Murray:** The UK-EU Specialised Committee on Fisheries has been given a number of tasks, including work on non-quota stock and on the Celtic sea technical measures. Minister, how confident are you that the committee will complete these tasks, given its failure to make substantial progress in 2021? Perhaps you could just tell the Committee if the industry is represented from each party on that as well, so that you get the industry's view.

Victoria Prentis: That is a challenging question on my confidence in the ability of the committee to deliver. The committee met twice last year. As you know, relationships last year were really quite strained, if I am honest. This year, I am more hopeful and probably more confident in the outcome of the work.

What we are waiting for at the moment is what Colin politely referred to as "eurocracy" when he was explaining this to me several days ago. We are waiting for the EU to set up a working group. When the working group is properly established, I am very confident that sensible people will be able to come to sensible conclusions, particularly on non-quota stocks, which are so valuable to us all. Do you want to tell us who is going to be on our side of the working group?



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Mike Dowell: I would be very happy to. In terms of industry representation on the specialised committee, which is almost another negotiation forum, the UK delegation will be made up of representatives from all the UK Administrations, chaired on our side by a UK Government member.

In terms of co-ordination with environmental non-governmental organisations and industry representatives, that will happen before the working groups and the meetings of the specialised committee, but they will not be in the room, as it were, for the meeting, just like in negotiations. That is how industry representation will be managed.

Like the Minister has already said, the Commission should have its working group up and running within the next few weeks. It is also seized by the priority of non-quota stock and technical measures in particular.

Q29 **Mrs Murray:** Just very briefly, because I know we have covered a lot of this before, how viable is it for the Specialised Committee on Fisheries to adopt multi-annual plans on quota species, with the first of those expected in July 2022? I know it was hard for the Commission to get its multi-annual management plans up and running. Do we expect to be able to meet that July target?

Victoria Prentis: I hope so. It is a real ambition for us.

Q30 **Mrs Murray:** Will the Commission be able to?

Victoria Prentis: I hope so. We will know how things are going when we see this working group and when we see whether the monthly data is being exchanged. I am very happy to update any members of the Committee on it at any point. We are really quite keen to get things moving on non-quota stocks.

Q31 **Mrs Murray:** What particular challenges face the EU and the UK in managing the non-quota stocks?

Victoria Prentis: We have covered that, really. Lack of data was one of the main issues, and also their valuability to industry on both sides.

Q32 **Mrs Murray:** I know that UK fishermen can meet that with the catch app. How is the EU recording the non-quota species from other member states' vessels?

Mike Dowell: We could write on the specifics as best as we could find out. I do not think that they use an app-based method, but it would be landings.

Victoria Prentis: It is not an app.

Q33 **Mrs Murray:** We are not going to get to the situation where they are estimating it, like we got to under the previous Labour Fisheries Minister, Elliot Morley, where it was realised that the under-10 metre catch was grossly overestimated. I hasten to add that it is only hearsay, but he had



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the sales notes in his office for a number of years, because he had no idea how to resolve the issue, but we are not going to get to that situation with the EU, are we?

Victoria Prentis: I am absolutely happy to write to the Committee with the details of how the EU does it. I am aware that it is not an app quite like ours.

Q34 **Chair:** Minister, sorry to interrupt but you will need to check with the EU exactly what it is doing.

Victoria Prentis: Yes, and we will, of course, have one month's data now. We will need to assess whether that is sufficient.

Q35 **Chair:** You can negotiate only if you are certain that the data that they are collecting is right.

Victoria Prentis: Absolutely, and the good thing about doing this monthly, and having agreed to do it monthly, which was your plan, is that we will have some lead-in. This will not be from a standing start.

Mike Dowell: It is monthly from now, but we do have all of last year's data, which we publish.

Q36 **Mrs Murray:** Through the Chair, I would just add that, had we not had those estimations all those years back, the under-10 metre quota would have been quite a significant amount more than it is or than what we started with.

Chair: It is considered by the fishermen an historic grievance, as you well know.

Victoria Prentis: That is partly why we were so keen to make sure that additional quota was targeted in that direction.

Q37 **Chair:** If you can sort that one out, Minister, you will be a very popular Minister with the fishermen. I wish you well with it.

Victoria Prentis: I have never met a popular Fisheries Minister.

Q38 **Rosie Duffield:** What is the risk that the work on the co-ordinated technical measures in the Celtic sea means that, in practice, the UK will end up following EU rules or an outcome that is at least very close to the EU? In other words, for all those fishers that were promised a Brexit bonus, is that something that they are going to get?

Victoria Prentis: Do you mean the discussions within the specialised committee?

Rosie Duffield: Yes.

Victoria Prentis: It is a committee in which we play a role as an independent coastal state. There is no question of measures being imposed on us. Just as in this Committee there is give and take and people have discussions, we have to come to an agreement within the



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specialised committee; otherwise no measures will be implemented. It is not a situation as it used to be before we were an independent coastal state, where things could be done to us.

Q39 Rosie Duffield: Can you guarantee that there will be no return to the days of remote decisions being taken in meeting rooms in Brussels? I suppose that is the same sort of thing. I know that my smaller fishing fleet across the east Kent coast do not particularly feel that they are part of those discussions, so how can your Department change that, even if it is just a perception?

Victoria Prentis: I can absolutely reassure you that this is a committee with give and take, and we hope that agreement will be reached on technical measures, for example, and on non-quota stocks and how we are going to take it forward. It will not be something that can be done to us anymore. It will be the product of discussion and agreement.

In terms of involvement of the industry, that is a much wider question across all the negotiations, truthfully. We probably do, now that we are an independent coastal state, need to look at ways to make sure that we have all the different parts of the industry feeding in. We have always had a close relationship with industry within our teams in Defra, but as we are now independent and negotiating in a slightly different way, we need to keep that constantly under review.

Q40 Rosie Duffield: With smaller fishing people as well.

Victoria Prentis: Yes, so that not just loud voices are heard, but also the quieter ones. That is very important.

Q41 Dr Hudson: Thank you, Minister and your colleagues, for being before us today. I wanted to get on to the details of the UK-Norway agreement. Could you briefly, for the Committee and the public, explain the new zonal access arrangement that is enshrined in the Norway agreement and how the arrangements agreed differ from those in place before the UK left the EU?

Victoria Prentis: It is quite significantly different. It is a very large reduction for Norway in what can be caught in our waters. Just let me look up the figures.

Q42 Dr Hudson: If I can press you on figures, there was a negotiation of mutual access to 17,000 tonnes of herring for Norway—

Victoria Prentis: Yes, and it used to fish 60,000 tonnes.

Dr Hudson: But the UK's quota is only 12,000 tonnes.

Victoria Prentis: They are different sorts of herring. Norway's is North sea herring and ours is ASH. It used to fish, from memory, 60,000 tonnes and it now has 17,000 tonnes. It is a very big reduction for its industry. I was very pleased with that, as, I suspect, many of our fishermen will be, because that leaves more open to us.



Q43 **Dr Hudson:** Those are the figures for herring, but broadly, how does the agreement differ from the situation before we left the EU?

Victoria Prentis: That is the reduction. It is a 43,000 tonne reduction for Norway in what it can catch in herring. There is also important and regular access, as I think you were about to say, Colin. In the past, the boundary in the sea was not marked in any way. It was always slightly arbitrary and slightly difficult for fishermen on both sides. What we have agreed is a much more fluid access arrangement, with a small amount of quota on each side being allowed, so that there is no longer this law around having to be the right side of the line. I hope I have explained that.

Q44 **Dr Hudson:** If I could press you on that detail with the final part of my question, what does the outcome mean for UK vessels fishing in Norwegian Arctic waters compared to the position before the UK left the common fisheries policy?

Victoria Prentis: The Arctic situation is, again, slightly different. We have had to negotiate some Arctic stocks separately. The TAC for Arctic cod was down considerably this year, by 20% or so. What we have negotiated, though, is that we have a slightly larger share of that. From memory, it is 7,000 tonnes.

Colin Faulkner: We received, in total, 7,000 tonnes in 2022. In 2021, we had 5,500 tonnes. At a time when the TAC fell by 20%, the UK's quota goes up by approximately 20%.

Victoria Prentis: It is not everything that our industry wanted, it is fair to say, but it is a substantial amount of money.

Q45 **Dr Hudson:** That is very helpful. Finally, Minister, if I could come back to one of your initial comments in the introduction, you talked about Britain's responsibility to the world's oceans and seas in terms of marine conservation and species, et cetera.

When we think about Norway and the Faroes, in our discussions and deliberations with them, and we think about global Britain and the pressure that we, as a country, can put on these countries in terms of our values and what we think about how the oceans and seas should be managed, what pressure can the UK Government put on the Faroes and Norway in terms of changing their practices on things like whaling and trying to get rid of that abhorrent practice? Is that something that Britain can have a role in on the world stage now?

Victoria Prentis: This is something that we raise very regularly, particularly with the Faroe Islands. You will remember, as will the rest of the Committee, the incident that took place last year, which was shocking to many of us and our constituents. I raised it in my very first letter to the new Faroese Minister and will continue to do so. We do repeatedly, do we not?



Colin Faulkner: Yes.

Victoria Prentis: They do not appear to resent that engagement and accept it as part of global engagement.

Q46 **Dr Hudson:** Can you give us an assurance that this important topic is on the table in discussions?

Victoria Prentis: Yes, absolutely.

Colin Faulkner: The last time I was in Tórshavn, in September, I raised the issue specifically on behalf of Lord Goldsmith, who had written to the Faroese Minister just a few weeks before. We were asked to make specific representations to the Faroese Government on my last visit to Tórshavn, in September, and were happy to do so.

The other point in this is that we have a really strong relationship with the Faroe Islands. They are an important partner, and the strength of that relationship allows us to make those types of representations with respect and to be listened to with respect.

Q47 **Dr Hudson:** It is also countries like Norway as well, though.

Colin Faulkner: The same point applies. The strength of that relationship allows us the space in which to make those types of representations when we need to do so.

Q48 **Geraint Davies:** UK Fisheries, and Kirkella in particular, have said that this deal is devastating for them in terms of their ability to fish for cod. They provide something like 8% to 12% of all cod for fish and chip shops. They say that this deal means that they have only one week's work, so how can that be seen as a success?

Victoria Prentis: We were able to negotiate, as I or Colin said—I cannot remember which—a significant uplift on last year. It is a Dutch and Icelandic-owned company. I accept that they are not content with the situation as it is, but it was an uplift. The Arctic cod that we were able to obtain for them is worth a substantial amount of money. It is important that, when we make these decisions—and they are decisions that we have to make, which is what we are going for in a negotiation—we do so in a balanced way for the UK industry as a whole.

Q49 **Geraint Davies:** On the figures, you mentioned that it is up on 2021, but they were mothballed in 2020. How does the new catch compare with the catch in 2019, for instance?

Victoria Prentis: It is quite significantly down on 2019. It is up on last year.

Q50 **Geraint Davies:** By how much is it down? They were saying that there were only a couple of weeks' worth of trade from their point of view.

Victoria Prentis: Last year, there was a substantial amount that we were able to negotiate for them. I remember direct discussions between



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me and that company about how many days' fishing that provided them with. Colin, you know them well.

Q51 **Geraint Davies:** I am looking for a figure for 2019 versus now and the negotiated settlement. I want the comparison.

Colin Faulkner: The figure was lower. I do not have the specific 2019 figure in front of me, but it is lower than 2019. The reason why it is important to put the context around this is that we have to remember that, in order to bring that quota in, we have to swap something out. The question is whose quota we give away in order to bring that quota in. Which UK fishermen should give away their quota in order to bring that Norwegian Arctic quota back into the UK? That is the key question. That is why it is a difficult negotiation to take forward. We take no pleasure whatsoever in the position that Kirkella finds itself in.

Victoria Prentis: We will continue to do our best for them, but we have to be balanced in our approach.

Q52 **Geraint Davies:** Ultimately, does this mean that the price of cod in British fish and chip shops will go up?

Victoria Prentis: No.

Geraint Davies: That is a relief.

Chair: I imagine that that is an international crisis.

Victoria Prentis: As we know, fisheries are very internationally owned. The company is called UK Fisheries but it is owned by a Dutch and Icelandic company, I believe. I am sure that, if the market is here, they will continue to sell here, because it is in their interests.

Q53 **Geraint Davies:** If this company was taken over by British ownership, would that have changed the outcome of the negotiations?

Victoria Prentis: No. We have to act fairly, taking into account the industry as a whole. We do take into account a multitude of representations from the industry as we go forward with negotiations every year. We will continue to do our best for the Kirkella, but I accept that they are disappointed.

Q54 **Barry Gardiner:** Minister, I am going to ask you about the article that was in *The Fishing Daily* last week. This is about the introduction of the vessel monitoring systems to the under-10s and the under-12s. It reported that, in December, it was finally said that it should be rolled out, that the kit now has to be installed by 14 March, and that the first Government initiative to get suppliers in front of fishermen and captains was announced only on 9 February.

The timescales on this seem ludicrously short. Certainly what Beshlie Pool and others have been saying is that this is putting enormous stress on individuals and that the mental health of fishermen is at an all-time low. I wondered how the Department was responding to that and whether you



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have any reassurances that you can give to those who are affected by it.

Victoria Prentis: Colin is going to come in, because he has been very involved in this.

Colin Faulkner: How are we responding? The direct answer is that we and the Marine Management Organisation are working very closely with some of the representatives who you mentioned in particular. We recognise that the introduction of I-VMS will be a significant change, particularly for the under-10 sector, which is why we are putting in place a significant amount of funding to help them buy the kit, for example.

Q55 **Barry Gardiner:** Just on that, the funding is limited to £650, whereas, with the over-12s and above, it was the full whack. There is much more limited funding now for the under-12s, and yet the kit that we are talking about has not been through the same rigorous testing at sea. This is new kit that has not been through that. Captains are very concerned that they may be putting in kit that has not been through the same process of evaluation, and yet they are going to bear much more substantial costs than those in the larger boats faced.

Colin Faulkner: We have heard those concerns pretty often from industry, I will be honest. We do think that the process of evaluation that you mentioned, for example, has been thorough. We recognise that there is more to do to work with industry to get this right.

Q56 **Barry Gardiner:** Has it been tested in at-sea trials?

Colin Faulkner: There is a prototype process underway at the moment to test all of these. All of the bidders who have come through to the shortlist of kit that fishers can choose from have been tested previously by the Marine Management Organisation. As I say, we recognise that there is more to do to make sure that industry feels comfortable with the kit and that it feels able to operate it. The reason why we are doing it is to provide exactly the type of data on what we are taking out of the sea that we were talking about earlier on I-VMS.

Q57 **Barry Gardiner:** We all agree with the objective here. I am really just talking about the speed of introduction and the pressure that people are facing. I would like you to specifically respond to the issues of mental health that have been flagged up in the press in recent weeks.

Victoria Prentis: The legislation is not yet in force. The current expectation is that it will come into force towards the end of this year. I am expecting an update on roll-out later this month. I am very happy to write to the Committee to explain how we are going on.

Chair: I was going to suggest that.

Victoria Prentis: Sorry, Mr Chairman; I know you want to crack on.

Chair: It is a very important point that Barry is raising, especially on fishers' mental health. Can we have that, please?



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Q58 Mrs Murray: I have seen the slide that you provided us with, but could you update us on the seafood fund? Over what period will the money for the two new pillars be spent? How will the bids be assessed and evaluated?

Victoria Prentis: I would refer people to this slide, if possible, because it is relatively complicated. There are three different pillars, as you say. Infrastructure is £65 million. We are collecting industry's views now. It is open for bids in early March, with awards in the summer. That is only the first round.

For the first round, we are looking specifically at bids that will take a long time to build, that might require planning permission or that will need considerable construction. We have listened to industry and, while we initially had an end date of March 2024, we are going to move that back to March 2025 in order to enable some of these really big projects to be built.

On skills and training, which you will see in the middle, and science and innovation, we are assessing bids received before awarding funding in the coming months for skills and training. On science, we will revert when we have further details of when we are going to announce that.

I have slipped in down at the bottom that £1 million has been put in to boost access to external markets. Mr Chairman, you will remember conversations that we have had previously about agrifood counsellors—this is fish food counsellors, effectively—and other measures to boost seafood exports.

Q59 Chair: Is that quite widespread across the world? How are you going to do that?

Victoria Prentis: The plans are currently being worked up. I know that I have a submission about them in my box at the moment. We will, I suspect, be targeting specific markets.

Q60 Chair: When you are ready, you can give it to us in writing.

Victoria Prentis: It will be quite good, when we have the personnel in post, to give you access, whether publicly or privately, to one of the agrifood or agrifish counsellors generally.

Q61 Mrs Murray: Bearing in mind the parliamentary question and the answer I received from the Secretary of State last Thursday, if you could roll this question in conjunction with that one, how will money under the UK seafood fund be used to support those sectors of the fleet and those communities that benefit less from the negotiated outcomes of the annual fisheries opportunities?

How will it be used to prepare our fleet so that it is upgraded to ensure that it is ready for when we reach the end of the five-and-a-half-year period, as mentioned in the TCA? Very clearly, we do not want the UK fleet to find itself in a situation where it cannot take up any extra



opportunities from a displaced EU fleet after that five-and-a-half-year period.

Victoria Prentis: I know that you, Mrs Murray, asked this question of the Secretary of State last week. I would again reassure you that I am not expecting bidders with large cash reserves to be receiving large sums of money under the UK seafood fund. That is not what it is for. It is to promote both economic and social sustainability of our fishing and coastal areas. It is important that we view it through that lens.

You will know what is going on in the Chamber at the moment with the levelling-up fund. It will be very interesting to see how some of those moneys can be used in conjunction with our fund here. I have already been approached by colleagues from across the House with ideas that they have for working in tandem with the levelling-up monies, and that is something that I am very keen to make happen, if we can.

End of June 2026 is the date that we are working towards. I would be delighted to meet the Committee, probably later this year and probably in private, to discuss the plans that we are making towards that date. I am very much aware that the clock is ticking. It is my priority to make sure that our fleet is ready for the opportunities that we will have then.

Q62 **Mrs Murray:** By “fleet”, I am talking about fishing vessels maybe upgrading safety and their contribution towards air quality. It is really important that we hear if you have any plans, as soon as you do, Minister.

Victoria Prentis: Yes, absolutely. As the Secretary of State said last week, he certainly thinks that the greening of the vessels is very much in scope of the scheme and, indeed, other safety upgrades—he has told you that before—as well as wider assistance, upgrading and modernisation of our vessels. It is very much in scope but less urgent than the infrastructure, because it will take less long to build, but vessels take a long time to build as well, as you know. It is important that we plan this early.

Q63 **Chair:** This is not for Defra, but the Treasury could accept that new boats should receive the same capital allowances as refurbished boats. I have been keeping on about this for some time.

Victoria Prentis: That is way above my pay grade.

Chair: It is 6% on a new boat and 18% on a refurbished boat, so it is really essential, if we are going to get our fleet up to scratch to catch these extra fish. It is a point that needs raising. I do not expect you to answer it today, but I will make that point.

Q64 **Ian Byrne:** Minister, could you update us on the licensing dispute with France, including the latest figures on licences granted, pending or rejected?



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Victoria Prentis: Yes, of course. I have them here. I will, with your permission, Mr Chair, send you the full note on the numbers, because it varies as to which area we are talking about. I will just give you the headlines, if that is alright.

We have licensed 1,717 EU vessels to fish in our waters. One hundred and fifty-eight are allowed to fish in the 6 to 12 nautical mile zone, 33 of which are direct replacements. One hundred and thirty EU vessels have received permanent licences to fish in Jersey waters. By “permanent”, I mean not temporary, not forevermore. It is worth noting that that is twice as many or thereabouts as Jersey’s own fishing fleet. Forty vessels have received permanent licences to fish in Guernsey. That is a summary. I will send the rest of the details to the Committee.

This is a fluid situation. We have acted throughout in accordance with our methodology, as have Jersey and Guernsey. I am confident that we have acted fairly and properly. I am conscious that France is still pressing for more licences.

Q65 **Ian Byrne:** Do the French agree with your summary?

Victoria Prentis: France is pressing, apparently, for more licences. I meet them fairly regularly. I last had a meeting with the French Fisheries Minister last week, I think—it could have been the week before—and I met some MPs from France yesterday to discuss licensing.

I am not sure exactly what they are seeking at the moment, and I would just gently remind the Committee that our agreement is with the Commission. The Commission has indicated several times that it is very happy with the methodology that we have used. We are obliged to act in accordance with the law, and the TCA makes it very clear that, if you can prove that you had historic access, the vessel should be licensed for the adjustment period. If you cannot prove it according to our very clearly set out methodology, which was agreed with the Commission, I am afraid that I cannot grant a licence. France knows our position on this. I have explained it to them many, many times.

Q66 **Chair:** Just before we leave this—you probably will not answer this question—has it more to do with the French presidential elections than it does necessarily with fishing? I do not necessarily expect you to answer that one, Minister.

Victoria Prentis: As far as I am concerned—I have said this to France repeatedly—it is, for us, about a methodology and the rule of law. It is not political. It has been difficult for our industry to watch this happen, but we have agreed to it and it is the law, and that is what we must do for the period as set out in law. Our industry was possibly better prepared for what was going to happen as a result of Brexit than some other nations were.

Q67 **Chair:** Our fishermen would expect you to be fair but also firm. Could you give us that assurance here today?



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Victoria Prentis: There is absolutely no question in my mind. This is nothing to do with politics. This is about applying an agreed methodology to a set of facts.

Q68 **Kirsty Blackman:** If you could bring out your crystal ball for a moment, what do you think is going to happen with this? You say that you are happy with the methodology and that you are comfortable, but what is going to happen next? Where is the end point that it is going to get to?

Victoria Prentis: We have always made it clear that we are sticking to our methodology and going through the system. When people produce evidence, we absolutely will look at it. I know the Commission was very keen at the end of last year to draw a line under it and to say, "That is it; we are stopping now". We did not feel able to do that because, after all, if people give us evidence, we will consider it. It is the reasonable and proper thing to do.

While a few more licences, as evidence is provided, are trickling out, this has slowed to a trickle now, because, frankly, if you have the evidence, we have broadly received it by now. I would not expect there to be an enormous group of new licences issued, unless the Commission has evidence that it has not yet shared with us. I will just continue to act in accordance with the law, as we have done so far.

Q69 **Kirsty Blackman:** I want to take you on to a question about the annual negotiations. I arrived late, so if you have covered this, I apologise. There has been some criticism made about the process from the point of view of stakeholders and the fact that they feel that it was quite opaque in terms of their ability to input into it and what they felt they were getting out of the discussions. You mentioned something around stakeholders, but could you please explain how stakeholders are going to be involved better in inputting into the discussions and getting responses out, should things change and they need to give an expert opinion again?

Victoria Prentis: That is a fair question. We are getting used to our new position as an independent coastal state. The other thing that I would say is that we are also getting used to virtual negotiations. This has been a bit of a step change for everybody. Instead of all being in the same hotel and able to grab each other in the lift, people are at home on Zoom and perhaps feel more left out than they would do in real life, as it were.

I met the ENGOs and the industry stakeholders before the beginning of the negotiations, and I certainly think that that is the proper thing to do. Colin met them during and beforehand 11 times.

Colin Faulkner: Very regularly—11 times during the trilateral and the bilateral with Norway.

Victoria Prentis: However, having said that, there is probably more that we could do to make sure that they feel included next year. I mentioned earlier that fisheries is a very international business. You will remember that last time I came to this Committee I was very unwilling to give away



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our negotiating position, in case it leaked out. I am not at all suggesting that industry is untrustworthy, but we do have to keep our cards fairly close to our chest.

Q70 Kirsty Blackman: Just on that, the NFFO specifically said that “a provisional list of TAC decisions was withheld pending formal adoption”, which is perhaps reasonable, but then it said, “leading to a garbled and chaotic verbal report by different officials without a common format”. If there is going to be this system where they cannot get all of the information, can you at least ensure that the information is consistent and correct?

Victoria Prentis: Yes. We can work with industry to make sure that we get this at least better, if not right, next year.

Q71 Kirsty Blackman: Have you given any consideration to the Norwegian approach, where the fishing industry and other stakeholders form part of the delegation?

Victoria Prentis: The gentlemen will correct me if I am wrong, but the Norwegians have two representatives in the room and not in the heads of delegation meeting. I would be hard pressed to choose two from our representatives of the fishing industry. Is that fair, Mike?

Mike Dowell: Yes, absolutely. We would have this conversation with the industry. You have the industry representatives in all four Administrations within the UK, and then very wide-ranging views and representations, depending on what you are catching and your fleet. Finding agreement amongst all of those on who they might want to put forward to be part of the delegation is a conversation that Colin and I are absolutely willing to have and explore. Colin is much more familiar than I am with the Norway model, but it is no easy street on the Norwegian side either.

Colin Faulkner: The Norwegian model is often held up as the gold standard on these things. They have a very different approach to how they involve industry in their negotiating team. What I would say is that there are two members of industry who are invited to be part of the Norwegian team, which is a perfectly good way of doing it from the Norwegian perspective. The challenge for us is, frankly, that judgment of Solomon around who the two people are who would represent the entire length and breadth of the UK fishing industry, sectorally and regionally, and how that would work for us in practice. There is a lot to be said for the Norwegian model, but we want to develop our own model.

Q72 Chair: But you will discuss this with the industry.

Victoria Prentis: Yes, and we could look at different ways of doing it. I have to say, thinking about the popularity of Fisheries Ministers, that having to choose two out of our very diverse industry would be quite a challenge.

Q73 Chair: I do not suppose that they have a method for choosing them



themselves, have they?

Victoria Prentis: That is the sort of thing that we could talk about.

Q74 **Kirsty Blackman:** I get why it is difficult to choose two, because there are so many different ways of fishing in so many different parts of the UK. How would you respond to the criticisms that too much primacy is given to not the north-east of Scotland and too much priority given to catches that are from vessels that are not in the north-east of Scotland, given north-east Scotland's comparatively massive contribution to the UK economy by our fishing fleet? It has, historically, been the case that swaps have been made, so that north-east Scotland fishers are losing out, in favour of south of England fishers. How would you respond to those criticisms?

Victoria Prentis: We work very hard to try to make sure that we are balanced in our approach to negotiations and any other change that affects the industry. It is very difficult. Some parts of the industry that we are dealing with are multimillionaires. Others are small fishing vessels of the sort we heard about earlier from Cornwall and Kent. There is not one industry in the UK. It is very disparate, and it is really important that we remember that with every decision that we take.

Q75 **Mrs Murray:** Just very quickly, every area thinks that its fishing fleet is the most important. As somebody who sat on a national organisation representing the north-east of Scotland, the south-west, the south-east, and the north-west of Scotland, decisions have always taken account of fairness amongst our UK fleet. No fisherman wants to be divided from his colleagues in other places in the UK. Would you agree?

Victoria Prentis: I would, and that is partly what this Committee is for as well. It is right that you hold us to account on that.

Chair: We know that as MPs when we are trying to get a joint number of people together from a county or a region and say, "What are we going to bid for?" and trying to get us to agree on exactly what we want, rather than not having what we want for our own constituency.

Barry Gardiner: On another point of order, is it in order for Sheryll and me to agree on something in this Committee?

Chair: It is, yes. I allow that. I do not think that you need to raise a point of order on it, though.

Victoria Prentis: I do not think that that one is for me.

Q76 **Chair:** We move on now to the next question. I will start off and then Neil wants to ask a supplementary towards the end. Given that the joint fisheries statement is meant to set out the policies for achieving the fisheries objectives in the Fisheries Act, what will the draft joint fisheries statement mean in practice for the fishing industry? How are you going to get that information out? Is it going to be highly technical?



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Victoria Prentis: You have a copy of it. It is a draft at the moment and I would genuinely very much like the Committee's feedback on it. The consultation runs until 12 April, so you have time to give us your views. It is fairly high level, it is a framework and it had to be agreed across the UK. With those caveats in mind, it is helpful but, as ever, the gains will be in the detail that flows from it. I am very excited about the fisheries management plans, which we are starting to work hard on now, and I very much hope that some of those will be ready later this year. As soon as we have the JFS agreed, they will be able to slot in underneath it.

Q77 **Chair:** Do the technical arrangements—the gear type and the net sizes and shapes—come into this or do they come afterwards?

Victoria Prentis: Unless it is nationwide, they probably come under the fisheries management plans in the local area. Most of the good work that we will do will be local, in conjunction with the industry, and will be quite technical and regional. The JFS is an important part of that. It is a framework. I do not want to do down the team that have spent a lot of time on it, or, indeed, those who I hope will respond to the consultation, but it is a framework, not the nuts and bolts.

Q78 **Chair:** What policy changes are you expecting to bring forward?

Victoria Prentis: The most exciting thing will be these local, very practical fisheries management plans. That is where local change will be. At a high level, the JFS says good things about sustainability. We agreed it across the four nations, which is not to be sniffed at. It sets out the fisheries objectives, which we agreed in the Fisheries Act and in the White Paper that the Secretary of State wrote some years ago when he had my job. The JFS is the framework with which we can make all that real. It is exciting.

Q79 **Chair:** Yes, it is. The Committee would probably like a private meeting with your key officials on this to take us through it. Then we will give you a response. Without that, it would be unwise for us to respond.

Victoria Prentis: I would also suggest that you start to think about what a real fisheries management plan looks like for the areas of some of the members of your Committee, and then we will all have real feedback.

Chair: We are going to get all members of the Committee to agree on that, are we? That should be interesting in itself.

Q80 **Mrs Murray:** Very quickly on that, will the fisheries management plans be joined with the inshore fisheries and conservation areas?

Victoria Prentis: They will not necessarily be the same areas.

Q81 **Mrs Murray:** But they will have to involve them.

Victoria Prentis: The IFCAs will, as night follows day, be a key part of local fisheries management, but do not think that they are going to mirror the IFCA areas. They will not, although they might.



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Q82 **Mrs Murray:** I am thinking of IFCA bylaws and things like that. If you are drawing up a fisheries management plan, you would have to include those.

Victoria Prentis: They are really going to be local and work for the local area. Of course, the IFCA's are a really key part of that.

Q83 **Dr Hudson:** In follow-up to your introductory comments, Chair, about balancing sustainability with quotas in the industry, and your introductory comments, Minister, where you said that we are not yet fishing sustainably, how would you respond to those who have criticised some of the measures and perhaps the fisheries statement for a lack of clear measures and timebound action to meet clear objectives such as protecting blue carbon habitats but also protecting sustainable fishing?

Victoria Prentis: We are very ambitious in this space. If it is going to work, it has to be done in conjunction with industry. You will see from the evidence I have given you this afternoon that sustainability is the thread that runs through the policy, totally accepting that we have not achieved everything that we need to do yet. We have worked to be as sustainable as we can in this year's negotiations while keeping a viable fishing industry.

We now have the fisheries management plans genuinely coming, and part of the framework with the JFS and so forth. We will be able to look, in a very local way, which is the only way to do this, at ways to really encourage sustainability in the sea. We need to do that with industry. We need to look at vessel changes, gear types, areas where we do not take and where we do take, what we take, and far more data. Please do not get the impression that this is not a key objective for us, because it really is.

Q84 **Chair:** Just finally on that, in the next three or four years we will increase the amount of quota that Britain gets, won't we?

Victoria Prentis: We will increase the quota, assuming that the science goes with us.

Q85 **Chair:** As we have left the common fisheries policy and the EU, the agreement was that we would gradually. The simplistic question to you is that, as we increase the amount of quota on some of these stocks, surely there needs to be a balance between sustainability and the amount we catch. We also need to make sure that we do not license boats from outside the UK into those waters.

Victoria Prentis: At the moment, we are bound by the terms of an agreement, with which we will comply, because it is the law. After that, we can look very carefully.

Chair: That is a very careful answer, Minister, so thank you for that. We will hold you to that. Like I said, if we could have that meeting in the future to discuss the joint fisheries statement and the way forward, that



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would be good. We very much appreciate your time. We are very much to time, so thank you very much. We stole only three minutes from you, which must be a record for this Committee. Thank you very much and we look forward to seeing you again.

Victoria Prentis: It was lovely to see you all.