

# European Scrutiny Committee

House of Commons London SW1A 0AA

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From: Sir William Cash MP

21 April 2021

Victoria Prentis MP  
Minister for Farming, Fisheries and Food  
Department for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs  
Seacole Building  
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## 2021 Fishing Opportunities

We considered your letter of 8 April 2021 on documents relating to the negotiation of fishing opportunities for 2021 at our meeting of 21 April.

Since you wrote, we note that the Government has proceeded to set fishing opportunities for the remainder of 2021. We look forward to further information from you on those opportunities and the implications for sustainable fisheries. We wish to be clear that you have set fishing opportunities in line with scientific advice and that you will make any relevant adjustments in the light of opportunities set by other coastal states to ensure that the aggregate opportunities continue to be in line with the advice.

We listened with interest to the exchange of views between the Commission and the European Parliament's Fisheries Committee on 13 April. Helpfully, the Commission provided substantially more information that day than you have done in your correspondence with us. The tone of the Commission's presentation was positive, suggesting that agreement was likely in the coming weeks but that political intervention might be required to conclude the negotiations. The Commission identified the following sticking points:

- TAC-related conditions, such as remedial measures in the Celtic Sea and other conditions pertaining specifically to implementation of the landing obligation;
- sea bass management, which is an issue that we recall as already challenging when the UK was an EU Member State;
- inter-area flexibility; and
- management of non-quota species.

Do you agree with the Commission that the above matters are the key sticking points? It would be helpful if you could expand on the difficulties encountered and the position being taken by the Government. We noted from the Commission that there are some particular technical challenges around agreement on the management of non-quota species and that the EU had resisted the UK's suggestion that ceilings be placed on individual species.

On wider matters relating to implementation of the TCA's fisheries chapter, the Commission explained that both parties had agreed that establishment of the Specialised Committee should await the conclusion of the annual consultations, although co-chairs and the secretariat have been appointed. The Commission expressed hope that the Specialised Committee would support future agreement on fishing opportunities and on common approaches to management of the shared resource. Is that a hope that you share?

On the wider set of negotiations with coastal states, we would welcome information on the sticking points encountered in the bilateral negotiations with Norway and we also ask you to set out the implications for the UK of the failure to reach agreement with the Faroes.

Turning to arrangements for 2022, including parliamentary scrutiny, we were disappointed that you aspire only to inform Parliament of relevant developments rather than engage with Parliament at a meaningful stage in the process. Your approach stands in marked contrast to that of the European Commission, which has agreed to appear before the European Parliament's Fisheries Committee at monthly intervals to exchange views on the evolution of the EU-UK fisheries relationship. We hope you agree that it is undesirable that the UK Parliament must largely rely on information given by the European Commission to the European Parliament rather than receiving information from the UK Government concerning matters of direct relevance to the UK. Is the UK Government content to provide a similar level of information to the UK Parliament on EU-UK fisheries matters as the European Commission is providing to the European Parliament? We trust that you will take immediate steps to plug the information gap that has developed. We ask for a response within ten working days.

We are copying this letter to Neil Parish MP, Chair of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee and Ian Bradshaw, Clerk of the Committee; the Earl of Kinnoull, Chair of the European Affairs Committee in the House of Lords and Simon Pook, Clerk of the Committee; your Departmental EU Scrutiny team; and Les Saunders and Donald Harris in the Cabinet Office.

**CHAIR**