

# **National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations – Written evidence (EEH0031)**

## **Introduction to NFFO**

1. The National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations (NFFO) is the representative body for the fishing industry in England and Wales. The NFFO exists to provide a voice for fishermen and leads policy change for the benefit of our members and the wider UK fishing industry.
2. We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the EU Environment Sub-Committee's inquiry into future UK-EU relations. As an agreement on fisheries was critical to the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement, and with the result a disappointing outcome for the fishing industry in the UK, there is no doubt that future relations between the UK and the EU on this issue will remain important.

## **What is your assessment of the relevant provisions in the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement, and their impact on your business or policy area?**

3. The NFFO is extremely disappointed by the outcome of negotiations with the EU. The best opportunity in a generation to revive the UK's fishing industry and support our coastal communities, has been lost. With the UK's exit from the EU and the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), the UK became an independent coastal state, but that independence has been seriously compromised by the terms of the agreement. This was an opportunity to ensure UK fishermen get a fair deal on quotas, revive the UK's coastal communities, bringing immediate and long-term opportunities, and grow the UK industry's role as world leaders in sustainable fisheries management.
4. The NFFO want to state strongly that it disagrees with the Government's presentation of the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement as a major success when it is clear to the industry that it is not.
5. The NFFO anticipated that in the interests of reaching a wider agreement with the EU on trade, some compromise would be made in relation to fisheries for a short transition period and that quotas might not be fully rebalanced immediately. However, the scale of the compromise, with a five-and-a-half-year transition period and minimal return of quota share, goes way beyond what can be considered fair or appropriate, or consistent with the repeated promises made by the Government to the fishing industry.
6. Importantly, over the next five-and-a-half years free access has been granted for EU fleets to fish in UK waters. Control over access is the UK's strongest lever to secure fairer quota shares and it has been ceded. There are institutional changes in the agreement with the introduction of the overarching Partnership Committee and the Specialised Committee for Fisheries (SCF). It remains to be seen how these will operate. Although the UK will negotiate as an independent party in annual negotiations and within the

specialist committees, without control over access, it will do so with one hand tied.

7. The provisions relating to the sharing of Total Allowable Catches (TACs) do not reflect the UK's legal status as a coastal state under UN Law of the Sea, or the international norm between coastal states which share fish stocks.
8. The NFFO is particularly disappointed with the Government's failure to secure an exclusive 12-mile limit to protect the UK's inshore fisheries. EU fleets could easily catch its quotas outside the UK's coastal zone, but even this goal has been sacrificed. This will impair the UK fishing industry's ability to manage its inshore fisheries.
9. From an initial assessment, the NFFO understands that following a further five-and-a-half-year adjustment period:
  - The UK's share of Western Channel cod will have increased from 9.3% to 10.2%.
  - There will be no change to the UK's share of Eastern Channel cod and France's share remains at 84%.
  - The UK's share of Celtic Sea haddock will have increased from 10% to 20%, leaving 80% in the hands of the EU fleets for a further five-and-a-half-year years.
  - The UK's share of North Sea Saithe increases from 23% to 26%, leaving the lion's share in EU hands.
  - The UK's share of sole in the Eastern Channel will have increased from 19.2% to 20%.
  - Increases in Western mackerel and North Sea sole have been secured but these will provide little direct benefit to most fishers in the UK unless they are used as currency for international quota exchanges.

### **What do those provisions achieve?**

10. These provisions achieve the effective freezing of Total Allowable Catches within a form of relative stability for the next five-and-a-half-years as opposed to the adoption of zonal attachment and a fundamental redistribution of quota allocation. In addition, they introduce the recognition, and prolongation, of fishing for non-quota stocks outside territorial waters on a reciprocal basis.
11. The annexes in the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement provide details of the increases in the UK's share of certain TACs over the next five-and-a-half-years of 25% of the current value. The small increase in the tonnage of quota to be received by the UK, and its selective nature, contrast with the expectations that the fishing industry were encouraged to believe.
12. The disappointing quota shares reflected in the agreement, combined with the replacement of a sophisticated system of industry-led in-year quota swaps by a more cumbersome arrangement for state-to-state quota exchanges, raises the spectre that parts of the fishing fleet in the UK could have access to significantly less quota in 2021 than in 2020. Using the

additional quota secured under the agreement could be used to mitigate this loss.

**What, if any, challenges arise because of those provisions? How could these challenges be resolved?**

13. The Government has failed to secure an outcome for the UK consistent with its legal status as an independent coastal state. For the next five-and-a-half-years, the UK has ceded access to fish in UK waters and is tied into disadvantageous quota shares. To resolve this, it is crucial that the Government works with the industry to increase quota and change access arrangements at the end of the adjustment period.
14. The uncertainties concerning Total Allowable Catches and, in particular, how international quota exchanges will take place based on what quota will be used as currency, and for whose benefit, etc. will have on-going negative effects upon fishing activity in the first part of the year at the least.
15. In addition, there is also uncertainty about access to both EU, Norwegian and Faroese waters. While this may be temporary, the seasonality of some fisheries means that significant opportunities are lost in the meantime.
16. There are also challenges arising from the allocation of additional quota secured from the EU. The NFFO believes that to seek an equitable resolution, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, George Eustice should allocate this quota first and foremost, for use as currency in international exchanges to secure quota for where there is an acute shortage.
17. The guiding principle for the allocation of additional quota should be that no group or vessel should be worse off as a result of the trade deal between the UK and the EU. The Secretary of State should resist pressures from devolved administrations and sectional interests and make a determination on additional quota based on need rather than political expedience.
18. The provisions on non-quota stocks in the agreement presents a considerable challenge. The tonnage cap on catches in EU and UK EEZs presents a series of practical management challenges.
19. Apart from the marginal increases in UK quota shares, the main beneficial changes as a result of the UK's new status are regulatory autonomy to manage fisheries within the UK EEZ and ability to negotiate as an independent party in international fisheries negotiations. Despite the constraints imposed by the TCA, these could be significant.

**What should the UK seek to accomplish with the EU in relation to your industry or policy area within the parameters of the Agreement in the short- and mid-term?**

20. The NFFO is disappointed that the Government's statements on the trade deal between the UK and the EU have focused on when the five-and-a-half-year adjustment period expires. The adjustment period allowed for in the

final deal, is greatly frustrating for many in the UK fishing industry. Fishermen have experienced forty years of being tied into an exploitative arrangement which is set to continue.

21. The industry fears that this period will only lead them into a form of 'Groundhog Day', when the EU will keep the industry tied into a Common Fisheries Policy-type arrangement on quota shares and access by repeatedly exerting its ability to bring greater economic power to bear on the UK, who after protests will again and again capitulate.
22. The NFFO is concerned that the way the deal has been constructed could lock the UK into the access and quota arrangements in the long term. It is crucial for the Government to provide information and assurances on this point and seek to increase quota and change access arrangements with the EU at the end of the five-and-a-half-year adjustment period.
23. Given the new parameters, the UK should:
  - Use what additional quota that has been secured from the EU, equitably, to ensure that no part of the industry is left worse off.
  - Negotiate robustly in international fisheries agreements to maximise fishing opportunities for the UK fleet.
  - Use its scope for regulatory autonomy to ensure effective management of the fisheries in UK waters.

***February 2021***