



Pádraic Fogarty
Campaign Officer
Irish Wildlife Trust
8 Cabra Road,
Dublin 7,
D07T1W2

Date: 23rd November 2020

re: submission on final proposals for fishing opportunities for 2021

The Irish Wildlife Trust (IWT) is an Irish non-profit organisation concerned with the conservation of Ireland's biodiversity. As an island nation our marine habitat is a vital component of our natural and cultural heritage. Its sustainable use is therefore an essential element in preserving our rich biodiversity as well as our economic well-being.

Article 2(2) of the Common Fisheries Policy Regulation states that "the CFP shall apply the precautionary approach to fisheries management, and shall aim to ensure that exploitation of living marine biological resources restores and maintains populations of harvested species **above** levels which can produce the maximum sustainable yield" (my emphasis). Allowing fish stocks to grow beyond their current levels is an essential component of building fisheries for long-term exploitation as well as repairing damaged marine ecosystems.

To meet these targets it is essential that the Irish government takes a strong position in adhering to scientific advice across all commercially exploited populations.

The IWT has particular concerns with regard to the continued overexploitation of sea fish and other marine life in Irish waters. In particular, the continued widespread use of bottom trawling is linked with the destruction of marine habitats, reduction in biodiversity and gargantuan levels of waste through 'discarding'. The IWT believes that bottom trawling is incompatible with meeting the aims of ending overfishing (due to its indiscriminate nature), ending discarding (as it is impossible to avoid unwanted bycatch) and protecting the marine environment as enshrined in the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD).

The IWT reminds the Irish government of the legally binding target to end all overfishing by 2020. The landing obligation, which is unworkable in its current form, is not being adhered to. This deadline has been missed and it is understood that legal proceedings against the Irish state are being taken.

We would also remind the government of the Dáil's declaration of a climate and biodiversity in May 2019.

A number of targets in the National Biodiversity Action Plan 2017-2021 relate to the CFP including:

Action 5.2.1: Continue to ensure the Common Fisheries Policy and marine fisheries provide for the conservation of fish species and marine biodiversity.

Action 5.2.2 Implement stock recovery plans for any fish stocks outside safe biological limits, and management plans to maintain other stocks as safe biological limits as determined by the standards for Good Environmental Status in the Marine Strategy Framework Directive.

Action 5.2.3 Adopt and implement provisions under the Common Fisheries Policy for the establishment of appropriate management measures (e.g. no take zones) that conserve biodiversity and fish stock levels.

The IWT would like to highlight that the Programme for Government states that: “**We [the government] are fully committed to the environmental objectives of the CFP...**” and that the government will “**actively promote setting annual quotas, in line with MSY principles**”.

There is a strong political and legal mandate to end overfishing and start on a path towards ecosystem recovery.

It is evident that the current form of fisheries management has failed and will continue to fail unless it is radically reformed. While single species management may be appropriate in some instances, e.g. for shoaling fish like mackerel, it is not appropriate for demersal/mixed fishing areas. Of the 19 commercially-exploited fish populations which are known to be overfished (mortality above MSY or biomass below safe biological limits), 11 are associated with demersal/mixed fisheries. At least ten populations, not including rays and skates, which are data limited, are also in this category. **We cannot end overfishing without addressing the fishing gear being used and which is causing the overfishing.**

ICES recommend a zero TAC for whiting in the Irish Sea, for cod and whiting West of Scotland, and for cod in the Celtic Sea. This means that fisheries for these species in these areas must stop where the gear used cannot discriminate between target and non-target species.

We would also point out, however, that even in the cases of mid-water, shoaling fish, where ending overfishing should be straightforward, there have been serious problems. Most notably with the collapse of herring in the Celtic Sea and West of Scotland where even following scientific advice has not prevented overfishing. In 2017 and 2018 official landings were *less* than the quota recommended and, even so, the fishery closed abruptly due to a lack of fish. ICES advice for 2021 for herring in the Celtic Sea is zero, suggesting that the fishery must remain closed for 2021. A longer-term closed areas must be put in place to allow for recovery. We suggest a large no-take zone in the Celtic Sea.

This points to an ongoing and systemic failure of fisheries management. We would like to point out that commercially valuable fish populations are also wildlife and essential biodiversity in the functioning of marine ecosystems. However, many of these ecosystems have now collapsed due to the failure of fisheries managers. The alternative must be an ecosystem approach to commercial fishing. This means prioritising the restoration of marine ecosystems and only allowing fishing that takes place within the limits of this recovery.

This will mean the closure of fisheries in the short-term. The Irish government should work with its European partners to request that the International Council for the Exploration of the Seas (ICES) is mandated to provide fishing advice based upon an ecosystem approach, and move away from single species assessments as appropriate.

This will see the use of Marine Protected Areas as fisheries management tools, particularly no-take zones where all fishing pressure is lifted and which can act as reference points against which to measure the impacts of commercial fishing. It is essential that the process of phasing out bottom trawling, which inherently unsustainable, be started as soon as possible.

The IWT acknowledges the social impacts of following scientific advice, and in particular the bottom trawling sector. Persistent failure by the Irish government, and its partners in the EU, to follow scientific advice and to prioritise the health of the marine environment has led to a situation where only drastic and disruptive interventions. We suggest that funds under the Just Transition mechanism be used to help fishers who will be impacted. We would also stress however, that restoring the long-term health of the ocean will mean greater economic opportunity in the future. Bold action must be taken now.

Yours sincerely,

Pádraic Fogarty