

Building a sustainable, strong and mutually beneficial joint Fisheries Management post-Brexit

Three years ago, the United Kingdom decided to leave the European Union, heralding a fundamental change in the UK's relations with its European partners. The European and British fishing industries will be at the forefront of that change. Indeed, as the UK will be leaving the Common Fisheries Policy, the fishing industries will have to find a new sustainable framework for cooperation in the waters that fishers have been sharing for centuries.

For the European Fisheries Alliance, this new chapter in our relations should reflect the realities on the ground and enshrine sustainable fishing. Political passions should be set aside and a sustainable framework that will protect sustainable, jointly managed fish stocks and the prosperity of the fishing industry, both in the EU and the UK, must be built. In that process short-sighted and politically driven agendas, as communicated by some more radical elements in the UK politics and fishing industry, should be resisted. It is important to recall that some in the UK still aim to fundamentally reshape how shared seas and shared fish stocks will be managed in the future, with drastic consequences for sustainability and economic prospects of fishing fleets.

It is undeniable that Brexit is an existential challenge for the European fishing industry. A hard Brexit, or any agreement denying us access to fish and fishing grounds, would have not only devastating consequences on our fleets, our fishermen, their businesses and their communities, but would also inevitably lead to tensions at sea and put sustainable joint stock fisheries management in jeopardy. This in turn would have severe consequences for all fleets involved, including the UK fleet.

EU negotiators and Member States have recognized the specific challenges and unique position of the fishing sector in the Brexit negotiations. EUFA is grateful to those decision makers for taking our concerns into account. Indeed, in the Political Declaration accompanying the Withdrawal Agreement, the United Kingdom and the EU have agreed that *"In the overall context of the FTA, existing reciprocal access to fishing waters and resources should be maintained"*.

In November 2018, October 2019 and December 2019, the EU-27 Member States were unequivocal in their support for the fishing industry stating that *"The European Council will demonstrate particular vigilance as regards safeguarding the rights and interests of citizens, the necessity to maintain ambitious level playing field conditions and to protect fishing enterprises and coastal communities. This will apply both when assessing the implementation of the Withdrawal Agreement, (...) and when considering the future relationship, in the field of environment regarding the alignment to European standards. As recalled in the Withdrawal Agreement, a fisheries agreement is a matter of priority, and should build on, inter alia, existing reciprocal access and quota shares. Such an agreement should be negotiated well before the end of the transition period"*.

Now the EU and UK have the opportunity to turn their shared political objective of the first phase of negotiations into concrete long-term reality. Regarding fish stocks, fishermen, fleets and coastal communities, the European Fisheries Alliance believes that this future relationship should be based on four core principles:

1. **Negotiate the Fisheries framework in the context of the wider EU-UK economic and trade relationship:** to ensure a level playing field between the EU and the UK across sectors including fisheries, the EU should establish clear conditionality between the level of access to waters and fisheries resources for its fleets and UK's overall access to the EU Single Market, in the overall context of the FTA.
2. **Cementing the current allocation of fishing opportunities:** the agreed allocation of fishing opportunities reflects historical reality, has contributed to improving the state of fish stocks and has benefited EU and UK fleets. It is a shared basis from which we should continue to work jointly addressing issues and to improve our common system while protecting the benefits of cooperation.
3. **Maintaining mutual access to waters:** fish know no borders. EUFA firmly believes that drawing artificial lines across waters we have shared for centuries only harm our shared objectives of sustainable fisheries management and economically successful fishing fleets.
4. **Continuation of sound, long-term fisheries management for our shared stocks:** the two blocs must aim at a level playing field on fisheries management by aligning and collaborating on the objectives, scientific underpinning, management measures and fisheries control & enforcement of their fisheries policies in such a way that effective and successful sustainable fisheries management for our many shared stocks will be maintained. This requires a long-term approach and framework.

EUFA strongly believes that the EU as well as the UK should strive for a clear, stable, sustainable, mutually beneficial and long-term agreement – based on our shared history and obligations, but also on acknowledging the benefits of our existing cooperation. **In short, our shared future must be grounded in sustainable fisheries management, an appreciation of reciprocity and our shared history and obligations.**

To finalize: EUFA calls upon European negotiators to remain firm and stand their ground in the face of political pressure. The sequencing or timely conclusion of the negotiations should not come at the expense of a long-term, stable agreement for the future. The European Fisheries Alliance remains confident that EU leaders will continue to support the fishing sector. We believe that an approach to fisheries negotiations based on a recognition of our mutual rights and responsibilities and in close linkage with the negotiations on the future economic and trade relationship will prevail over short-term political goals. We stand ready to support you in this.

Brussels, January 2020

Additional considerations on the four pillars of the future joint Fisheries Management Framework

1. Negotiating the Fisheries framework in the context of the wider EU-UK economic and trade relationship

Fishers would not be catching fish if it was not for fulfilling the needs of consumers to avail of healthy and sustainably produced seafood. Fisheries management and the activities of the catching sector are part of a wider economic ecosystem that needs to be considered when negotiating the future framework. **As recognized in the Political Declaration and agreed to by the United Kingdom, Fisheries should be negotiated as part of the wider economic and trade relationship with the United Kingdom.**

This is nothing else than acknowledging the unique character of fisheries and the sector's mutual dependency on a shared, widely traded, resource. If the EU fisheries sector is to a large extent dependent on catches in what will become UK waters, the UK fishing industry is not only catching on average 22% of their catch in EU waters but is also exporting 80% of its entire catch, 75% of which to the EU Market. The UK catching industry, like many other sectors of the UK economy, has largely benefited from EU membership. This only confirms that fisheries as agreed by both the EU and UK in the Political Declaration should be negotiated as part of the wider economic and trade relationship with the United Kingdom.

2. Cementing the current allocation of fishing opportunities

We believe that the current quota allocation adequately reflects the economic and historical equilibrium between EU countries. Currently, the Total Allowable Catches (TACs) of relevant commercial species are distributed between the United Kingdom and other EU Member States in accordance with the 1983 sharing agreement. This agreement reflects the situation after the United Kingdom joined the European Economic Community in 1973 and has been the foundation of European fisheries for over 36 years. Moreover, this quota distribution has taken into account both historical practices and specific local considerations. Fisheries-dependent communities were offered preferential treatment for allocation keys; and in fact, both the United Kingdom and Ireland benefited from such a clause.

However, there is a widespread view within the British fishing sector that Brexit offers an opportunity to increase the British share of the available resources. This is based on the fundamental belief of the UK fisheries sector that the current policies are solely in the EU-27 and not the UK's interests. This simply is not factual. The current arrangements have benefited all parties involved and this must be taken into consideration while designing a future framework of cooperation.

Data show that the UK is still by far the largest fishing nation within its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). In the period 2006-2015, the British fleet accounted annually on average for 462,000 tonnes - 42% of the total volume – and € 662 million, 55% of the total value of landings within the UK EEZ. EU-27 fleets caught 637,000 tonnes in UK-waters, valued at € 547 million.

On the other hand, the UK fleet caught over the same period 22% of their total annual catch volume in EU-waters which represented 21% of their total catch value. Dependency of access to fishing grounds is therefore reciprocal, albeit for the UK fleet to a somewhat lesser extent.

These data also clearly show that the United Kingdom benefited from a quota allocation key that took its specific concerns into account. Consequently, there would appear to be no justification for a unilateral redistribution of quotas. The effect of such drastic redistribution would be felt far beyond the British EEZ – it would also affect those vessels sharing quotas with the United Kingdom outside of its waters. As representatives of European fishing fleets, we believe that the TAC & Quotas system, including international quota swaps, should continue to reflect the economic and historical equilibrium of the sector.

Only the current allocation will ensure sustainable management of the many stocks we share, as well as stability and continuity for the industry. The current management system under the Common Fisheries Policy has required painful efforts by the industry but has led to an undeniable improvement in the state of stocks. Jeopardizing these achievements for short-term economic and political gain would not only be irresponsible from a sustainable stock management perspective but also go against everything our industry has stood for in the last two decades.

Hence, a quota reduction for European fleets would only lead to severe negative consequences for the entire sector on the continent, throughout the value-chain.

EUFA considers that the current quota distribution has benefited British and EU fleets. We therefore ask the European institutions to ignore unfounded emotional arguments and defend the current de facto situation and to do so as indicated in the Political Declaration in the overall context of the FTA.

3. Maintaining mutual access to Waters for both quota and non-quota species across the North Sea, the Channel, the Irish Sea or the waters west of Scotland

European and UK fishers have shared fishing grounds for centuries well before international law of the Sea (UNCLOS), Exclusive Economic Zones or Community waters were codified. Maintaining mutual access and thereby acknowledging a historical and practical reality is thus crucial. Indeed, should the UK deny our fleets access to their waters, EU fishermen stand to lose an average of 42% of their catch in volume, with this number raising sharply for some fleet segments.

The unwarranted loss of access to those waters would have serious socio-economic consequences for many European fleets, but also for the whole value-chain. Industry estimates show that loss of access would lead to a reduction of the net profit of European fleets by about 50%. This reduction in revenue and correlated reduction in fleet size would lead to the loss of at least 6000 full time jobs both in the fleets and the upstream and downstream sectors. In addition, such estimates do not account for the wider loss of employment in coastal communities across Europe depending on the fisheries industry. This does not also take into account the risk of tensions at sea that would arise in such a scenario and the major disruption to trade with severe economic consequences for the EU and UK seafood industries.



EUFA believes that a future fisheries arrangement must aim to guarantee unrestricted and continued reciprocal access to UK and EU waters in accordance with these historical practices, in order to sustain the many coastal communities that depend on fisheries.

4. Continuation of sound, long-term fisheries management for our shared stocks

Fisheries has the potential to contribute to a positive and strong future bilateral relationship between the EU and the UK. EUFA welcomes and supports the goal set in the Political Declaration to reach an agreement by July 2020. Such agreement must be stable and long-term and build on the achievements of the current joint sustainable management while reflecting our historical ties and interdependence. The concept of recurring annual negotiations on access and sharing should be rejected strongly, as it does not do justice to the extraordinary depth and scope of our relationship.

In that spirit, precooked models such as the annual negotiations with Norway should not be considered as a precedent. During the annual discussion between EU and Norway only fisheries management measures – such as TAC levels of shared stocks – are discussed and decided. Not the access and sharing keys. These have remained untouched since the original agreement made close to four decades ago.

Indeed, a new framework is required, one that builds on the scope of the Common Fisheries Policy and covers all aspects of sustainable fisheries management. This entails close alignment and collaboration on the objectives, scientific underpinning, management measures and fisheries control & enforcement of their fisheries policies in such a way that effective and successful sustainable fisheries management for our many shared stocks will be maintained.

EUFA remains convinced that to achieve the goals of sustainable stocks and prosperous fleets a long-term framework is required that takes into account all aspects of fisheries management.

The European Fisheries Alliance represents counts 18,000 fishermen and 3,500 vessels throughout the Member States sharing fishing grounds with the United Kingdom. Our fleets feed into a thriving value-chain ranging from wholesale markets to maritime cooperatives and support countless coastal communities across the EU.

Brussels, January 2020