From the Chairman of the Committee

Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
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19 June 2019

I write on behalf of the Committee to request an update on the Government’s preparations for fisheries after the UK has left the EU and the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). I would be grateful if you could provide us with the answers to the questions below by 18 July to allow the committee time to consider them prior to the expected summer recess.

As you are aware on 7 June the European Commission published its Communication on the setting of 2020 fishing opportunities, which said: “If the UK leaves the EU without an agreement on 31 October 2019, or before, as agreed by the European Council, the EU and the UK will have to consult each other on the joint management of the stocks they share...The implications of the UK’s withdrawal for setting fishing opportunities will be reviewed in the light of the latest developments.”

Should the UK enter a post-Brexit transition period before the end of 2019 or, should Article 50 be extended into 2020, any negotiations for 2020 fishing opportunities would take place under the CFP framework. In the event of a no-deal exit by 1 January 2020, however, the UK would operate in 2020 as an independent coastal state.

Notwithstanding that leaving the EU on or before 31 October 2019 with a Withdrawal Agreement is current Government policy, given the uncertainty about whether that will be achieved, or will remain Government policy under the new Prime Minister what is DEFRA doing to prepare to negotiate fishing opportunities for:

(a) the 2020 calendar year in the event that the UK has the status of an independent coastal state by 1 January 2020; and

(b) the 2021 calendar year in the event that the UK has the status of an independent coastal state by 1 January 2021?

In his letter of 20 November 2018 to the Committee, the then Fisheries Minister George Eustice MP, referred to a future fisheries agreement with the EU, and said “that new arrangements on fishing will be in place in time to be applied the first year after the
implementation period", i.e. for 2021 unless the implementation period is extended into 2022 as allowed under the existing withdrawal agreement.

What plans, and capacity have you put in place to negotiate such an agreement? Also, what arrangements have you made to engage with Parliament, including informing both Houses and the relevant committees about negotiating aims, updating them as negotiations proceed, providing opportunities to debate the agreement and taking their views into account?

The Fisheries Bill has still not returned to the Commons for its remaining stages, please can you provide an update on when you expect it to return to the House. Can you also update us on what alternative arrangements you are making to ensure the UK will have a robust domestic fisheries regime in place for the UK once we have left the EU in the event that you are unable to pass the Fisheries Bill in the limited Parliamentary time remaining before Exit Day.

Neil Parish MP
Chairman of the Committee