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European Union Committee

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George Eustice MP
Minister of State
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Nobel House
Smith Square
London

Dear George

9341/15 Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council Consultation on the fishing opportunities for 2016 under the Common Fisheries Policy

Thank you for your explanatory memorandum (EM) of 12 June 2015, which was considered by the EU Energy and Environment Sub-Committee at its meeting on 8 July 2015.

We welcome your positive comments on the progress that has already been made in the overall improvement in the state of fish resources. We note that several Member States recalled the importance of setting up multiannual plans with a multispecies approach for fish stocks at the Agriculture and Fisheries Council last month and we share your support for this approach.

Ahead of the introduction of the demersal landing obligation (DLO) in January 2016, we note your Department's position that changes need to be made to the current fisheries management regime in five key areas of fisheries management: phasing; quota management; regionalisation; on shore management and monitoring and enforcement. Specifically on regionalisation:

“Under the regional groups the Government has a role in ensuring scientifically robust exemptions are secured for the benefit of the English fleet, to avoid disproportionate costs from the implementation of the landing obligation.”¹

In the light of the fact that regionalisation features prominently in the reformed CFP at an EU-wide level, we would be interested to learn how the regionalisation process, which results in decisions being made that are more appropriate to the regional fishery, is being carried out here in the UK to avoid those disproportionate costs.

¹ DEFRA Impact Assessment on the Implementation of the Demersal Landing Obligation
https://consult.defra.gov.uk/fisheries/demersal-landing-obligation-in-england/supporting_documents/Consultation%20Impact%20Assessment.pdf

As you will know, demersal fisheries are more prone to catching a higher proportion of mixed species than pelagic fisheries and so the use of selective gear can be important in helping to minimise unwanted catch. We would appreciate information on what support is being made available for fisheries which may be disproportionately affected by the DLO to purchase more selective gear or adapt existing vessels in other ways.

We note the specific suggestions set out by the Commission as to how TACs should be formulated for DLO species. We would welcome your comments on: the expected timing of publication of regional discard plans in order that they can be taken into account in the scientific advice for 2016 TACs; the process for setting TACs for DLO species in mixed fisheries; and the process for setting TACs where scientific information on historic levels of discards is low.

On the subject of Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY), and noting that the Commission's point that the only relevant factor for not meeting MSY in 2016 would be if it lead to "very large annual reductions of fishing opportunities that would seriously jeopardise the social and economic sustainability of the fleets", to what extent do you believe that fishing at or above MSY in the long-term encourages sustainability?

We note that you did not refer to sea bass management in your Explanatory Memorandum. Nevertheless, the Commission indicates that it will propose measures for the sustainable management of that stock in the context of a proposal for a western waters multiannual plan. Could you tell us how you are working with the Commission on the development of measures for the sustainable management of the stock?

We will retain the Communication under scrutiny and look forward to your response within 10 working days.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the European Scrutiny Committee, Sarah Davies, Clerk to the European Scrutiny Committee, Arnold Ridout, Legal Adviser to the European Scrutiny Committee, Les Saunders, Cabinet Office and Ali Scoleri, Scrutiny Coordinator, Defra.

Yours sincerely,

Tim Boswell

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Chairman of the European Union Committee