



## UK Fishing Quota Agreements for 2015

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Under the the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), every year annual quotas for fish species in EU waters are agreed by Ministers. 2015 is first year that fishing opportunities are being set under the rules of the reformed Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). This note summarises the negotiations and decisions taken over UK fishing quota agreements for 2015.

On 11 December 2014, in the backbench business debate on the fishing industry, Members questioned the Minister on, among other issues, his priorities for the EU Agriculture and Fisheries Meeting on 15/16 December 2014, where annual quotas are agreed. The Minister explained that he was committed to supporting the UK's world class fishing industry and would aim to deliver a fair deal for UK fishermen.

On 15 and 16 December 2014, the Fisheries Minister Mr George Eustice MP represented the UK at the EU Agriculture and Fisheries Council meeting alongside representatives from the Scottish and Northern Irish devolved administrations.

These negotiations resulted in agreements to increase quota from 2014 levels for fishermen in several areas, including: North Sea cod 5% and Nephrops (prawns) 15%. The Government also negotiated for reduced quota cuts in other areas, for instance initial proposals would have seen Celtic Sea cod quotas cut by 64%, but this was reduced to 26%. 2014 quotas for a number of stocks were maintained for 2015 in several instances. There was, however, no agreement on measures to arrest the decline in sea bass stocks.

Negotiations with the Faroe Islands delivered additional quota and opportunities in Faroese waters and an early agreement with Norway on fishing opportunities in the North Sea will see a quota rise in haddock and cod in 2015.

The Government hailed the quota agreements as a fair deal, and the National Fisherman's Federation Organisation (NFFO) saw the deal as striking a balance between protecting fishing livelihoods, whilst continuing to rebuild fish stocks. However, environmental groups raised concerns that the deal included fishing quotas above the scientific advice which would fail to adequately protect depleted fishing stocks. Furthermore, angling groups expressed their disappointment that no deal had been reached on bass conservation measures.

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### **1 Common fisheries policy (CFP)**

The UK's fishing industry is regulated at an EU level by the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) and managed in the UK by the Marine Management Organisation (MMO). Under the CFP, every year, the European Commission proposes a Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for each commercial species for each area within the EU 200-mile limit. TACs are then shared between EU countries in the form of national quotas. Since 2011, negotiations regarding reform of the CFP have been ongoing with an agreement reached in December 2013.<sup>1</sup>

The new CFP establishes that decision-making such as fixing fishing opportunities must be guided, among other things, by scientific advice at a maximum sustainable yield (MSY) of the fish stocks and provides for a progressive elimination of discards in all EU fisheries through the introduction of an obligation to land all catches.<sup>2</sup>

2015 is first year that fishing opportunities are being set under the rules of the reformed Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) and this note examines the negotiations and decisions taken over the allocation of fishing quotas for 2015.

For further information on CFP reform, please see the Library Standard Note, [Reform of the Common Fisheries Policy \(CFP\), 2014-2020 SN/SC/5957](#).

### **2 Annual fishing industry debate, December 2014**

On 11 December 2014, a backbench business debate was convened on the topic of the [fishing industry](#).<sup>3</sup> This debate gave MPs a chance to debate issues related to the fishing industry, including quotas, marine conservation and in particular provided an opportunity for Ministers to question the Fisheries Minister on his priorities for the EU Agriculture and Fisheries Meeting on 15/16 December 2014.<sup>4</sup>

At the end of the debate, Fisheries Minister George Eustice responded to the Members' statements and questions raised throughout the debate. On the issue of the forthcoming EU Fisheries meeting, he stated:

"Last Thursday I had a meeting with Commissioner Vella in Brussels to begin the negotiating process for the December Council. I made a number of key points on the

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<sup>1</sup> Defra Press Release, "[New Common Fisheries Policy deal ends discards](#)" (10 December 2013).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> [HC Deb 11 Dec 2014 c1003-1055](#).

<sup>4</sup> [HC Deb 11 Dec 2014 c1003-1055](#).

science. First, we should use the most recent data available where they are relevant. In the south-west, in particular, there is a lot of evidence of a late recruitment of haddock this summer, which we want to be taken into account in the December Council. Secondly, when it comes to data-limited stocks, we oppose simply having an automatic, precautionary approach. We believe that we should make the best possible judgment with the data we have, rather than having arbitrary cuts, and we have made that point already to the Commission. Thirdly, as the hon. Member for Great Grimsby highlighted, it is important to have what we call mixed fisheries analysis. There is no point in dramatically cutting the quota for one species if it is in a mixed fishery, because fishermen cannot avoid it and will therefore end up having to discard it. Finally, we want to ensure that account is taken of the increased use of more selective gears.”<sup>5</sup>

### 3 EU Agriculture and Fisheries Meeting, December 2014

On 15 and 16 December 2014, the Fisheries Minister Mr George Eustice MP represented the UK at the EU Agriculture and Fisheries Council meeting alongside representatives from the Scottish and Northern Irish devolved administrations (Richard Lochhead and Michelle O’Neill).<sup>6</sup>

Prior to the meeting Fisheries Minister [George Eustice explained his ambitions and negotiating priorities for the meeting](#):

“I’m committed to supporting our world class fishing industry and will be aiming to deliver a fair deal for our fishermen across the UK. To do this we’ll be using the best and most up to date science available to make the right decisions for our stocks and fishing fleets that depend on them.

“We have a strong track record of leading the pack when it comes to fisheries including securing reforms to the broken Common Fisheries Policy so regional differences are now taken into account in decision making.

“Having heard from different parts of our fleet I will be representing the entirety of UK fisheries to achieve our shared goals of a thriving fishing industry, sustainable fish stocks and a healthy marine environment. Setting annual quota ensures the sustainability of our stocks and is a vital process to support the long term future of the industry.”<sup>7</sup>

Following the outcome of the EU Agriculture and Fisheries meeting in Brussels on 16 December 2014, [UK Fisheries Minister George Eustice commented](#) on the difficulty of the negotiations, whilst maintaining that he was pleased to have secured the “best possible deal to ensure sustainable fisheries and a strong UK fishing industry”.<sup>8</sup>

A [press release](#), published by the European Commission after the meeting ended, set out the agreed fishing opportunities in 2015 for certain fish stocks in EU and non EU waters and commented on the outcomes as follows:

“The Council reached a political agreement on fishing opportunities for 2015 for EU vessels in Union and certain non-Union waters on the basis of a Presidency compromise, drawn up in agreement with the Commission.

[...]

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<sup>5</sup> [HC Deb 11 Dec 2014 c1048-1049](#).

<sup>6</sup> Defra Press Release: [UK secures fair fisheries deal in Europe](#), (16 December 2014).

<sup>7</sup> Defra Press Release: [UK lobbies for fair fisheries deal in Europe](#) (16 December 2014).

<sup>8</sup> Defra Press Release: [UK secures fair fisheries deal in Europe](#), (16 December 2014).

“This is the first time that those fishing opportunities are set under the rules of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) reformed last year. The new CFP establishes that decision-making such as fixing fishing opportunities must be guided, among others things, by scientific advice. Furthermore, the new CFP aims to restore and maintain a maximum sustainable yield (MSY) of the fish stocks and provides for a progressive elimination of discards in all EU fisheries through the introduction of an obligation to land all catches.”<sup>9</sup>

#### 4 2015 fishing quotas agreements

The [landing obligation](#) – also known as the discards ban – is effective as of 1 January 2015 in pelagic fisheries. For all other fisheries, there is no change in 2015.<sup>10</sup>

##### ***Pelagic Fisheries***

Pelagic fish get their name from the area that they inhabit called the pelagic zone of ocean or lake waters – being neither close to the bottom nor near the shore. In contrast, demersal fish live on or near the bottom, and reef fish are mainly associated with coral reefs.

Pelagic fish often occupy the open waters between the coast and the edge of the continental shelf in depths of 20-400 metres. In northern waters around Scotland the main pelagic fish species are herring, mackerel and blue whiting, with smaller populations of sprat and horse mackerel.

The main characteristic of these pelagic fish populations is that they are mobile or migratory. Mackerel migrate from the spawning areas west of Ireland that they occupy from March through to July to the Viking bank area of the North Sea for the winter.

On 16 December 2014, the Government outlined the agreements reached on fishing opportunities for 2015. The Government maintained that decisions taken were based on three principles: following the available scientific advice; achieving sustainable levels of fishing; and reducing discards.<sup>11</sup>

The Government highlighted agreements for increases in quota for many parts of the UK’s fishing fleet, including increases to cod and haddock in the North Sea, Nephrops (prawns) in the Celtic Sea, sole in the Western Channel and angler (monkfish) and haddock in the West of Scotland. In addition, the Government secured an agreement to rollover current 2014 catch levels for several species, including skates and rays around the UK.<sup>12</sup>

The table below highlights a selection of the agreements on 2015 fishing opportunities for certain fish stocks in EU and non EU waters (comparisons are made to 2014 quotas), but it is by no means exhaustive (blank spaces indicate information missing rather than no change):

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<sup>9</sup> European Commission, [“PRESS RELEASE: 3360th Council meeting Agriculture and Fisheries Brussels”](#) (15/16 December 2014).

<sup>10</sup> European Commission, [“Landing obligation: effective as of 1 January 2015”](#). Accessed online: 22 December 2014.

<sup>11</sup> Defra Press Release: [UK secures fair fisheries deal in Europe](#), (16 December 2014).

<sup>12</sup> Defra Press Release: [UK secures fair fisheries deal in Europe](#), (16 December 2014).

Sea area	2015 fish species quota (%) change to 2014 quota							
	Angler (monkfish)	Cod	Haddock	Herring	Nephrops (prawns)	Plaice	Saithe	Sole
Bristol Channel						0%		-15%
Celtic Sea		-26%	-12%	-30%				
Eastern Channel		-	-	-				-28%
Irish Sea		-	0%	-	+3%			-
North Sea		+5%	-	-5%	+15%	+15%	-15%	0%
North Sea and West Scotland	+20%		+6%					

**Table. A selection of 2015 fish species quotas percentage to change to 2014 quota. Gaps indicate areas where data is currently unavailable.**

Negotiations with the Faroe Islands to deliver additional quota and opportunities to catch a number of species in Faroese waters were also agreed at the Fisheries Council. In addition to the EU quota agreements, the UK Government accepted an early agreement with Norway on fishing opportunities in the North Sea. This agreement will see a quota rise in haddock and cod in 2015.<sup>13</sup>

#### 4.1 Sea bass

The Government unsuccessfully negotiated for measures to address declining sea bass levels. Commenting on these negotiations, the Government stated that:

“...despite pressing hard for measures to address declining sea bass levels we were disappointed not to leave negotiations with an agreement on specific measures to tackle this issue. The UK government has led on action to improve these stocks and has now secured a commitment from the Commission to work with Member States to reduce fishing pressure at the start of the season in 2015.”<sup>14</sup>

Mr Eustice expressed his disappointment at failing to address the declining bass stocks:

“I was disappointed no decision was reached this year to improve bass stocks but will be following up on the Commission’s commitment to work with Member States in the New Year. The UK has been a lone voice on this issue and it is essential we achieve a balanced approach which reflects the contribution of both commercial fisheries as well as recreational anglers on declining bass numbers.”<sup>15</sup>

The Angling Trust were angered by the failure to secure a deal on measures to protect sea bass stocks, describing the meeting as a “shambles [and] anything but a ‘fair deal’”. Mark Lloyd, Chief Executive of the Angling Trust commented on the agreement, by stating:

"This is very disappointing news but we feel that that the government has now run out of excuses for putting off introducing domestic measures on bass minimum landing sizes, more nursery areas and increased protection for estuaries. The Angling Trust will be working with supportive MPs in Westminster to step up our campaign for meaningful action to save British bass stocks on behalf of a million sea anglers. Once

<sup>13</sup> Defra Press Release: [UK secures fair fisheries deal in Europe](#), (16 December 2014).

<sup>14</sup> Defra Press Release: [UK secures fair fisheries deal in Europe](#), (16 December 2014).

<sup>15</sup> Defra Press Release: [UK secures fair fisheries deal in Europe](#), (16 December 2014).

again we have seen yet another example of politicians across Europe failing to do anything other than manage the continued decline of our precious fish stocks."<sup>16</sup>

## 5 Commentary on 2015 quota allocations

Environmental groups, such as Greenpeace, expressed their displeasure at the agreed fishing quotas for 2015 for failing to adequately protect depleted fishing stocks. For instance, [Greenpeace EU fisheries policy director Saskia Richartz](#) said:

"It is unacceptable that many of the fishing quotas agreed today fail to end overfishing. Ministers gave no justification for postponing action to recover fish stocks, despite new laws requiring that any delay is justified with appropriate evidence."<sup>17</sup>

Furthermore, [Pew Charitable Trust](#) – an independent think-tank which advocates a sustainable fisheries policy – criticised EU Ministers for setting quota agreements higher than the scientific advice. Uta Bellion, director of The Pew Charitable Trusts' European marine programme commented:

"Fish stocks and fishing communities are put at risk when ministers disregard the agreed policy and continue to legislate overfishing [...] The policy does allow for delays beyond 2015, but only if there is evidence that sticking to the deadline would seriously jeopardise the social and economic sustainability of the fishing fleets involved. We have so far seen very little evidence of this.

"Pew is calling on Karmenu Vella, the new European commissioner for environment, fisheries, and maritime affairs, to do his utmost as custodian of the reformed CFP to ensure that overfishing ends within the agreed timelines."<sup>18</sup>

In contrast, the [National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations \(NFFO\)](#) – the fishing industry body – hailed the agreements on fishing quotas for 2015 as striking a balance between protecting fishing livelihoods, whilst continuing to rebuild fish stocks. The [NFFO chief executive, Barrie Deas](#), said:

"The Council certainly demonstrated it was prepared to put livelihoods before political dogma masquerading as science. There were always going to be winners and losers and some of the cuts will still have major impacts on fishing businesses and communities around the country but we are relieved that, for the time being, ministers have listened to our call to protect an industry that provides livelihoods to so many and such a valuable, sustainable food source to our island nation."<sup>19</sup>

At the culmination of the meeting, Mr Eustice similarly reflected on a deal which the Government described as, "[striking the right balance between supporting business and conserving fish stocks](#)", by stating:

"While fishermen had feared there would be major cuts from the Commission, by bringing new science to the table we were able to keep the same quota as last year for many species, including monkfish, megrim and pollock in the South West and skates and rays around the UK. This was in addition to important increases to North Sea cod and haddock quota which will benefit Scottish fishermen.

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<sup>16</sup> Angling trust, "[Press Release – Angling Trust Slams EU Bass Shambles As Anything But A 'Fair Deal'](#)" (17 December 2014). Accessed online: 22 december 2014.

<sup>17</sup> Greenpeace Press Release: [EU fisheries ministers fail to end overfishing](#) (16 December 2014).

<sup>18</sup> Pew charitable Trust, "[EU Fisheries Council Sets Catch Limits Higher Than the Scientific Advice](#)" (16 December 2014). Accessed online: 22 December 2014.

<sup>19</sup> NFFO, "[Press Release: Ministers strike a balance to protect livelihoods' – December council outcomes](#)" (18 December 2014). Accessed online: 22 December 2014.

“In some cases there are still some reductions in quota, but I entered these discussions with the firm belief that any decisions need to support our shared goals of a thriving fishing industry, sustainable fish stocks and a healthy marine environment. If we want a long-term future for our industry we have to listen to the available science and agree fishing opportunities which support the sustainability of our stocks.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Defra Press Release: [UK secures fair fisheries deal in Europe](#), (16 December 2014).