

Negotiations: Industry concerns mount over real-world quota repercussions

Fishing industry representatives from Cornwall have expressed mounting concern over negotiations for a UK/EU fisheries agreement for 2025. At stake for the southwest are total allowable catches and quotas for critically important stocks including sole, hake, pollack, haddock, bass, and spurdog. There are no signs that an agreement is imminent despite a deadline set in the UK/EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement for 10th December. By this time last year most of the key decisions had already been made.

Industry anxieties centre on the fear that legal action, by Blue Marine and other environmental NGOs, has spooked UK ministers into avoiding necessary management correctives to headline ICES advice, where mixed fishery issues and socio-economic concerns feature. The EU seems reluctant to follow this hard line approach, hence the standoff.

Paul Trebilcock, Chairman of the Cornish FPO said, “The scientific advice includes a range of catch options consistent with maintaining stock biomass at sustainable levels and it is important for the health of fishing businesses and fishing communities that these are given due weight in the negotiations. Our concern is that ministers are prioritising avoiding NGO criticism over the welfare of the fishing industry. We have no doubt over NGOs’ clout in the media and the colossal budgets that supports it. But avoiding management responsibilities carries real-world and political costs.”

“Ministers need to be reminded that the outcomes from these negotiations carry real-world repercussions and that the fishing industry will be alert to any sign that the new government is playing fast and loose with its future for fear of criticism from NGOs which, frankly, can be guaranteed anyway. Farmers are not particularly happy with the government at present. Alienating the fishing industry as well would not be a clever move if there are ambitions to be more than a one-term administration.”

“For most stocks, following the ICES headline advice makes complete sense. But the scientists do provide alternative options which are also consistent with sustainable outcomes to deal with precisely those stock situations that we currently face in the South West. It is these that are now apparently being ignored for wholly political reasons. That is not acceptable.”