

Rùnaire a' Chaibineit airson Cùisean Dùthchail agus na h-Àrainneachd
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Dear Rob

AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES COUNCIL: 17 OCTOBER 2013

I am writing to provide you with a short report on the EU Agriculture and Fisheries Council meeting which I attended in Luxembourg on the 17 October 2013. The report is attached.

I am copying this letter to the Convener of the European and External Relations Committee, for information.

RICHARD LOCHHEAD

REPORT ON THE EU AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES COUNCIL: 17 OCTOBER 2013

SUMMARY

1. Ministers reached agreement on Baltic Sea fishing opportunities for 2014, setting out the maximum quantities of certain fish stocks which can be caught in the Baltic Sea with the aim of achieving Maximum Sustainable Yield. Ministers also discussed the forthcoming EU-Norway consultations for jointly managed stocks and the annual International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) meeting which will take place in mid-November. At the request of Ireland, the Commission briefed Council on their latest position on North East Atlantic mackerel management and negotiations with Iceland. Council gave overall consensus to support the Commission's approach on the condition that Norway were on board with any mackerel deal.
2. The Council meeting was held in Luxembourg and Vigilius Junkna, Minister for Agriculture of Lithuania presided over the Council.

KEY OUTCOMES

Baltic Sea Total Allowable Catches (TACs) and Quotas for 2014

3. Council reached agreement on the fishing opportunities for certain fish stocks in the Baltic Sea, predominately setting TACs and quotes for 2014. The Presidency remarked that an agreement had only been possible because of the considerable preparatory work which took place beforehand at regional level in the Baltic Sea Fisheries Forum (BALTFISH). The key points of the agreement include: an increase in herring for the Eastern Baltic; an increase in Cod TACs in the Eastern Baltic and a reduction in the Western Baltic Cod TACs. Commissioner Damanaki commented that the work of the Baltic States and of BALTFISH was a good example of regionalisation and of sustainable management of stocks.

EU-Norway: annual consultations for 2014

4. Council exchanged views in advance of the consultations with Norway for jointly managed stocks. The first round of consultations will take place in Ireland on 18-22 November and the final round in Norway on 2-6 December. Member States expressed a range of views with the majority asking the Commission to take a cautious and balanced approach to setting TACs. A number of Member States commented on the importance of working closely with Norway in the mackerel dispute with Iceland and the Faroe Islands.

ICATT Annual Meeting

5. Ministers exchanged views in advance of the ICCAT annual meeting which will take place in Cape Town, South Africa on 18-25 November. Several Member States pointed to the positive scientific results suggesting a recovery of the Bluefin Tuna stock and asked for an increase in TAC. Other Member States were keen to maintain the current TAC and not reopen negotiations until next year. The UK commented on the importance of increasing protection for vulnerable shark species. The Commission supported this call and indicated they would be asking the organisation to continue efforts in the protection of sharks and to support the EU ban on shark finning.

AOB

North East Atlantic Mackerel Management and Coastal State Negotiations

6. At the request from Ireland, the Commission updated Council on the negotiations ongoing with Iceland and the Faroe Islands since 2008 regarding the management of North East Atlantic mackerel stocks. The Commission had recently communicated that they were close to finding agreement on the long standing dispute. This had raised some concerns among Member States, including Ireland, that the potential deal might not be in the best interests of the EU. Several Member States supported the Commission's effort to find an agreement but stressed that a deal should not come at any cost and should be jointly agreed with Norway. The Commissioner (Damanaki) commented that she found the exchange useful, agreeing that any deal should involve Norway and would preserve EU interests.
7. The next Agriculture and Fisheries Council will take place on 18-19 of November in Brussels.