



European Association of Fish Producers Organisations (EAPO) (Northern Pelagic Working Group – NPWG)

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EU pelagic fishermen accuse Icelandic Government of a disingenuous propaganda exercise over mackerel dispute

EU pelagic fishermen are accusing the Icelandic Government of undertaking a disingenuous propaganda exercise by attempting to justify their reckless and irresponsible actions on the Atlantic mackerel and at the same time trying to create a divide between the EU seafood processors and the EU pelagic fishing sector.

The Icelandic Ministry of Industries and Innovation has embarked on a series of propaganda briefings throughout the EU for the local seafood industry and other fishing industry stakeholders in a bid to try to justify their massive, unjustified unilateral increase in mackerel quota. Iceland, who caught only 363 tonnes of mackerel in 2005, set themselves a mackerel quota for 2012 of 145,000 tonnes, putting the health of the stock in jeopardy.

The Faroe Islands, after stepping out of the mackerel management agreement in which they participated from the start, also set itself a massive unilateral quota of 148,375 tonnes in 2012, which was so large that it had to invite foreign vessels to catch the stock on their behalf.

Gerard van Balsfoort, chair of the Northern Pelagic Working Group, finds it incomprehensible “that the Icelandic Government has entered the path of justifying the unjustifiable, while at the same time threatening the sustainability of the healthy mackerel stock and also endangering many jobs in the pelagic fishing sector across the EU and the future prosperity of fishery dependent communities”.

For the last four years, a protracted number of serious attempts by the EU and Norway to reach a sensible deal on mackerel have been repeatedly rebuffed by Iceland and the Faroes. The widespread anger caused by their unsustainable fishing practices and intransigent negotiating position recently led to the EU agreeing to a sanctions package against both Iceland and the Faroes. This threat of a possible sanction package now has caused the Icelandic Government to hire a prominent UK based PR company to put a positive “spin” on their irresponsible behaviour.

The truth behind Iceland’s sustainability credentials has been that it has increased its mackerel catch since 2005 from 363 tonnes per year to 145,000 tonnes – a 40,000% increase and totally out of line with scientific advice. Iceland says it is seeking a 15% share of the overall north-east Atlantic mackerel catch, but for the last three years it has been taking a catch of 24%. That is a totally inconsistent position and underlines their total irresponsibility when it comes to sensible and responsible fisheries management.

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