



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

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PRESS RELEASE

European mackerel fishermen demand fairer deal on Faroese access

The Northern Pelagic Working Group (NPWG), organized under the auspices of EAPO (European Association of Fish Producers Organizations) are urging Member States and the European Commission to reduce the current access arrangements for Faroese fishermen which allows them to catch large amounts of mackerel in EU waters.

Under the EU-Faroe islands bilateral deal negotiated in 2014, a quota exchange agreement and an access arrangement was finalized. The access part of the deal enables vessels from Faroe Islands to catch part of their own mackerel and blue whiting quota in EU waters rather than in Faroese waters, and in return EU vessels can catch some of their quota for these species in Faroese waters.

But an economic report on the access arrangement just published by the independent UK body Seafish¹ has found that this part of the agreement is heavily skewed in favour of the Faroe Islands. The report reveals that the EU receives no benefit from the agreement as its vessels did not catch any mackerel and only 1,400 tonnes of blue whiting in Faroese waters in 2014, with a value of £187,000. Conversely, the Faroese used 93% of their mackerel and blue whiting access quota in EU waters with an estimated catch value of £42.1m.

The deal is now up for its annual negotiation during the early part of December and the NPWG is calling for the EC and the Member States governments to adopt a strong stance to ensure a more equitable agreement is reached.

Gerard van Balsfoort, chairman of NPWG, said: “We understand that the bi-lateral arrangement is important for a small section of the European demersal sector so we are not against a limited agreement. It is also desirable to have international fisheries agreements rather than countries setting autonomous quotas.

“However, the part of this particular agreement that is causing us huge concern is the access arrangement for mackerel. This has given Faroe Islands the opportunity to catch in excess of £40m worth of high quality mackerel which is now being sold into the same markets as the European

¹ The full Seafish report - Utilisation in 2014 of the Quota Exchange and Licence Entitlement in the EU-Faroe Bilateral Agreement - can be viewed at: <http://www.seafish.org/publications-search>

mackerel processors and traders, creating marketing difficulties.”

“The market situation is already challenging given the Russian /EU trade dispute, the devaluation of the Ukrainian currency and significant currency import problems with Nigeria since the oil economy crash. These are all important markets that are now effectively closed”.

“This access agreement is having a detrimental impact on the profitability of the European pelagic sector which is a significant direct and indirect employer across a number of north-west European countries.

“We urge Member States and the EC to adopt a tough stance in the forthcoming negotiations by substantially reducing the mackerel access element of the agreement, especially since the Faroese fleet’s threefold increase of their share in the mackerel quota has entirely been based on the increased catches of mackerel within their own waters.”

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