



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

13 March 2014

Partial agreement reached in Northeast Atlantic mackerel negotiations

After years of heavy dispute and intense negotiations the EU, Norway and Faroe Islands signed yesterday in London a 5 year sharing agreement for the Northeast Atlantic mackerel stock. Yet another major player, Iceland, is not part of this agreement. Also Greenland, a newcomer in these fisheries, is outside the agreement, as is Russia.

The EU mackerel fishing industry, organized under the banner of the Northern Pelagic Working Group, can only express mixed feelings regarding this new agreement. On the one hand the NPWG underlines the necessity that parties would return to a joint management and sharing of this most valuable stock for the EU pelagic industry. The NPWG therefore welcomes this 3 party agreement as the first step towards joint management, although Iceland still has to be brought into the agreement and a solution must be found for the recently developed Greenland mackerel fisheries.

On the other hand however the NPWG has to face the fact that the share of the Faroe Islands, that was agreed yesterday, has increased from 4.6% to 12.6%. Up to 2010 Faroe Islands was part of the coastal states agreement sharing and managing this stock with a share of 4.6%, but decided to step out and started setting unilaterally mackerel quota for its fishermen amounting up to 22.7% of the scientifically advised Total Allowable Catch. Which means setting autonomous quota on top of the ICES advice and by this jeopardizing the mackerel stock. The remaining 2 parties EU and Norway continued to set their quota shares in conformity with the scientific advice.

Gerard van Balsfoort, chair of the NPWG, stated: "I can only conclude that the irresponsible behaviour by the Faroe Islands has paid off for them. Their share has increased from 4.6% to 12.6%. This sets a bad precedence for the future as most of the pelagic stocks in the N E Atlantic are shared and jointly managed. We see already that Greenland has copied the approach developed by Faroe Islands and – being outside the agreement – has awarded themselves a 2014 mackerel quota of 100,000 t. In fact the Faroe Islands has already copied their mackerel behaviour by stepping outside the existing coastal state agreement for Atlanto Scandic herring in 2011 and setting unilaterally much higher quota for this vulnerable stock".

There is also another dimension to this dispute about which the NPWG is deeply worried. Which is about the behaviour of the European Commission as the sole negotiator for the EU for this type of agreements. The current Commissioner Maria Damanaki has in the view of the pelagic fishing industry alienated herself from her fishing sector by refusing to sufficiently defend the interests of the EU fishing industry. This in sharp contrast with the situation in the other coastal states where Norway, Iceland, Faroe Islands, Russia and Greenland are prone to do so. The end result is always that the EU gives in to the demands from the others.

Moreover, in a situation that the EU and Norway are bound in a 10 year bilateral mackerel agreement, it was the Commissioner who without prior consultation or consent from Norway went in September 2013 to Reykjavik to offer Iceland an unprecedented share of 11.9% in a future agreement. She did the same in early December 2013 towards Faroe Islands. These solo-actions by the Commissioner sparked off an intense controversy between EU and Norway as if they were the opponents, while in fact they were allies in the negotiations with Iceland and Faroe Islands.

For the same reasons the annual bilateral negotiations between EU and Norway were taken hostage by this approach by the Commissioner which is why many white fish fishermen in the EU were denied their usual access into Norwegian waters made possible under the bilateral EU-Norway arrangement. This of course should never has happened as the whitefish fleet has nothing to do with the mackerel dispute.

The big picture is that the agreement reached yesterday in London means that the share of the EU pelagic industry in the N E Atlantic mackerel has been reduced by about 20%. And it still has to be seen how much mackerel access Faroe Islands will be given in EU waters which is at this moment being discussed as part of the bilateral negotiations between the EU and Faroe Islands.

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