

Fishing Opportunities for 2011

REVISED (FINAL)

This note summarises the changes in fish quotas and other management measures that were agreed at the annual end-of-year European fisheries negotiations before Christmas. In summary, Shetland whitefish vessels face cuts in quotas for monks, haddock, cod and saithe, although increases were agreed in whiting and megrim quotas, as well as further reductions in fishing effort. For the pelagic fleet, increases were agreed in both herring and mackerel quotas.

Introduction

Quotas and other management arrangements for fish stocks in the North Sea are agreed annually for the year ahead through a two-stage process: Management arrangements for fish stocks jointly managed with Norway (including cod, haddock, whiting, saithe and herring) are agreed through negotiations between the EU and Norway. These arrangements are then ratified, and management arrangements for other fish stocks in European waters agreed, at the 'end-of-year' meeting of the European Fisheries Council in December.

The 2010 EU-Norway negotiations were concluded on 3rd December, setting the quotas for 2011 (and certain other management measures) for most of the main species of importance to the Shetland fishing fleet. Quotas for other species were formally agreed at the Fisheries Council meeting that concluded on 15th December

This note summarises the principal measures agreed that are relevant to the Shetland fishing fleet.

Whitefish Species

In 2009 (the last year for which data are available) the Shetland whitefish fleet landed £17.3 million worth of fish. A further £8.9 million worth was landed in Shetland by non-Shetland vessels. The table below shows the main whitefish species landed by the Shetland fishing fleet and the agreed changes in UK quotas for each. These species accounted for 90% of the value of whitefish landed by Shetland vessels in 2009, worth some £16 million.

	Proportion of Landings by Shetland Fleet in 2009 (% of landings by value)		Change in Quota from 2010 to 2011 (North Sea)
Monks	31 % (£5.3 m)	↓	- 15 %
Haddock	19 % (£3.2 m)	↓	- 2 %
Cod	18 % (£3.1 m)	↓	- 20 %
Whiting	8 % (£1.4 m)	↑	+ 21 %
Megrims	6 % (£1.0 m)	↑	+ 5 %
Saithe	6 % (£1.0 m)	↓	- 13 %
Ling	4 % (£0.6 m)	→	0 %
Other species	10 % (£2.4 m)		----

NOTE: there may be some further minor changes to these figures as a result of quota swaps, etc.

As may be seen, quotas for monks, haddock, cod and saithe have all been cut, while those for whiting and megrims have been increased. The quota for ling remains unchanged.

Impact Assessment

Although substantial, the cut in monk quota is unlikely to have much actual impact on local whitefish vessels because the local fleet failed to catch its full monk quota in 2010. If local vessels are able to catch their full monk quota in 2011 this would exceed their 2010 catch, even with the agreed quota reduction. The greatest impact on the local whitefish fleet is thus likely to come from the reduction in cod quota.

Overall, an initial crude analysis suggests that the agreed changes in quotas for the top seven species listed above could result in a loss of income to local whitefish vessels of approximately £1 million in total, about 5% of the value of their landings in 2010. Although not huge, it should be stressed that this loss will not be shared equally by all vessels. Rather it will fall most heavily on vessels that have a higher

level of dependence on cod, some of which are likely to face much larger losses. This analysis also takes no account of the effects of reductions in fishing effort, or other management measures.

Catch Quotas

An expansion has been agreed in the system of 'Catch Quotas' (also referred to as: 'fully documented fishing', 'catch-less-land-more', 'land-all-you-catch', etc.) which has been championed by the Scottish Government and was trialled by some Scottish fishing vessels in 2010. The scheme remains limited to cod despite Scottish Government efforts to expand it to other species.

Background

Scientific advice on fish quotas assumes that a certain proportion of fish catches will be discarded. The predicted amount of discarded fish is deducted from the total amount of fish that it is estimated can safely be removed from the stock to give the recommended quota. For example, if it was estimated that a total of 30,000 tonnes could be removed from a stock, and that 10,000 tonnes were likely to be discarded, a quota of 20,000 tonnes would be recommended.

'Catch Quotas' are based on the principle that if fishermen discard less fish they should be allowed to land more marketable fish. In the above example, if discards could be halved to 5,000 tonnes then the quota could be set at 25,000 tonnes, without changing the total amount removed from the stock.

Under a catch quota scheme discards are prohibited and all fish caught (including undersized) have to be landed and counted against the vessels' quota. Participating vessels are fitted with CCTV cameras and other monitoring equipment to record the fish that are caught and to ensure that no discarding takes place. When a fisherman has exhausted his quota he has to stop fishing, even if he still has uncaught quotas for other species not covered by the scheme.

Vessels that participated in the Scottish trial in 2010 were allowed to land 30% more cod and received an additional allocation of fishing effort (days at sea).

Catch quotas have been strongly championed by the Scottish Government (and some sectors of the Scottish fishing industry) which sought both to extend the scheme in 2011, and to extend it to other species (especially haddock). However, substantial concerns remain in other sections of the Scottish fleet (including in Shetland) about the suitability of the catch quota scheme in its current form.

Catch Quotas in 2011

It has been agreed that the current catch quota scheme can be extended to more vessels in 2011, but it remains limited to cod. The agreement provides Scotland with

an additional 12% cod quota to use in the 'Catch Quota' scheme in 2011 (after the agreed 20% cut). Scottish fishing vessels wishing to participate in the scheme in 2011 have been invited to submit 'bids' to a competitive tendering process, i.e. to state how much extra cod they would require to join the scheme. It is understood that about 57 Scottish whitefish vessels have applied to join the scheme in 2011, including seven from Shetland.

It is not yet clear how many vessels will be accepted into the scheme in 2011, as this will depend on the levels of the bids submitted. At 2010 levels the extra cod quota available in 2011 would allow the number of vessels in the scheme to be roughly doubled to about 35 (out of a Scottish fleet of just over 100). If vessels are able and willing to accept a lower level of cod 'premium' then more could participate in the scheme.

The basic fact is, however, that the extra cod quota allocated to Scotland is not sufficient to allow a large proportion of the Scottish whitefish fleet to receive a significant extra allocation of cod quota for participating in the scheme. Vessels that remain outside the 'Catch Quota' scheme, whether by choice or because they cannot be accommodated, will not benefit from the extra allocation of cod quota and will be faced with the full 20% cut.

Many fishermen, including many in Shetland, remain deeply sceptical of the 'Catch Quota' scheme, and concerned about its implementation in Scotland. The greatest concern is the potential cost of being forced to stop fishing when their cod quota is exhausted, and thus potentially being unable to catch all their quotas of other species. Despite these reservations the Scottish Government remains committed to extending the 'Catch Quota' system, both to more vessels and more species, and this forms a central strand of its current fisheries policy.

Fishing Effort / Cod Recovery Plan

Under the Cod Recovery Plan, Scottish whitefish vessels also face a further reduction of about 12% in their fishing effort (the time they can spend at sea) in the North Sea in 2011. The details of how this further cut will be implemented by the Scottish Government remain to be seen, but this is likely to include a continuation (in some form) of the current system of Real Time Closures.

Pelagic Species

In 2009 (the last year for which data are available) landings of pelagic fish by the Shetland fleet were worth £51 million, with a further £39 million worth landed in Shetland by non-Shetland vessels. The table below shows the main pelagic species landed by the Shetland fishing fleet and the agreed quota changes for each.

	Proportion of Landings by Shetland Fleet in 2009 (% of landings by value)		Change in UK Quota from 2010 to 2011 (North Sea)
Mackerel	87%	↑	+ 8 %
Herring	13%	↑	+ 23 %
Other species	0%		----

A significant increase in the herring quota for 2011 was agreed by the EU and Norway.

Despite the failure to reach agreement with Iceland or Faroe over the allocation of mackerel quotas, the agreement reached by the EU and Norway will result in an increase in the UK mackerel quota of about 8% in 2011.

Both Iceland and Faroe have again set themselves substantial unilateral mackerel quotas for 2011.

Further Information

If you have any queries, or require any further information, please contact me at the NAFC Marine Centre.

Ian R. Napier

10th January 2011