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Marine Planning, Policy and Advice Section - Fisheries Policy Analysis

Fishing Opportunities for 2012

FINAL OUTCOMES

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Fishing Opportunities for 2012

The European fisheries negotiations that were concluded before Christmas have set the fishing opportunities that will be available to Shetland fishing vessels in 2012. Quotas for some important whitefish species have been increased (although others have been cut) but further cuts in fishing effort (days at sea) were pushed through and are likely to be much more significant for this sector.

For the pelagic fleet, a substantial increase in herring quota has been agreed. The outlook for mackerel remains unclear, given the on-going with Iceland and Faroe.

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 2011 EU-Norway negotiations were concluded on 2nd December, setting the quotas for 2011 (and certain other management measures) for most of the main species of importance to the Shetland fishing fleet. These measures were ratified, and quotas for other species, and other management measures, were agreed at the European Fisheries Council on 15th and 16th December.

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

Whitefish Species

In 2010 (the last year for which data are available) the Shetland whitefish fleet landed £18.1 million worth of fish. A further £7.9 million worth of whitefish 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 or proposed quota changes for each. These species accounted for 89% of the value of whitefish landed by Shetland vessels, worth some £16 million.

	Proportion of Landings by Shetland Fleet in 2010 (% of landings by value)	Change in Quota from 2011 to 2012 (North Sea)
Cod	25 % (£4.5 m)	↓ - 1 %
Monks	21 % (£3.8 m)	↓ - 6 %
Haddock	17 % (£3.1 m)	↑ +14 %
Saithe	8 % (£1.4 m)	↓ - 15 %
Whiting	7 % (£1.3 m)	↑ + 18 %
Megrims	6 % (£1.0 m)	→ 0 %
Ling	4 % (£0.7 m)	→ 0 %
Other species	11 % (£2.0 m)	----

As may be seen, while quotas for monks, saithe and cod have been cut, those for haddock and whiting have been increased. Proposed 'precautionary' cuts in the quotas for megrim and ling were averted. The cut in monk quota is not significant as the Shetland fleet has been unable to catch its existing monk quota in the last few years, due to limits on fishing effort (see below). Overall, on their own the quota changes would probably be at worst neutral and possibly beneficial for local whitefish vessels, but cuts in fishing effort (see below) are likely to be more important.

Fishing Effort

Under the Cod Recovery Plan there will be a further cut of about 15% in fishing effort by whitefish fishing vessels in the North Sea in 2012 - the number of days that vessels are allowed to spend at sea. The exact details of how the available effort will be allocated have not yet been confirmed, but under the existing system fishing vessels would receive in 2012 either a flat rate allocation of 90 days, or 56% of the average number of days they used in the years 2004 to 2006.

There had been hopes that this cut could be deferred, pending a review of the Cod Recovery Plan, but the Commission adopted the position that the cut was mandatory

under the existing Regulation and there was insufficient support within the Council of Fisheries Ministers to overturn this.

Alleged Overfishing of Effort

The Commission dropped measures that it implemented to 'claw back' effort from UK (and some other nations) fishing fleets that it alleged had exceeded their effort allocations over the last few years. The disagreement arose from differences in the ways that the Commission and the UK Fisheries Departments had interpreted the regulations used to calculate effort entitlements. The Commission has now accepted the UK's interpretation, so UK fishing vessels will not be penalised for this alleged overfishing.

Catch Quotas

The amount of extra cod quota available under the Scottish Catch-Quota system will remain fixed at 12% in 2012, and the scheme remains limited to cod. Under the scheme vessels that agree not to discard any cod, and to be monitored by CCTV to ensure compliance, receive an additional allocation of cod quota. (The number of vessels that can be accommodated in the scheme is likely to remain limited, and to date has included only one Shetland vessel.)

Whitefish - Discussion

On their own, the agreed quota changes would probably benefit Shetland whitefish vessels, especially the increases in quotas for haddock and whiting.

However, fishing effort - the number of days boats are allowed to spend at sea - has become the dominant factor determining the fishing opportunities for local whitefish vessels. The further cut in effort that has been imposed under the cod recovery plan will leave vessels with little more than half the time at sea that they had a few years ago.

As has been mentioned, restrictions on days at sea have already contributed to Shetland whitefish vessel being unable to catch their full monk quotas in recent years, and there is growing concern (both within the Shetland and Scottish fishing industries) that these latest cuts in effort will not allow fishing vessels enough time at sea to catch their full quotas of other species.

Pelagic Species

In 2010 (the last year for which data are available) landings of pelagic fish by the Shetland fleet were worth £42 million, with a further £42 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 2011 to 2012 (North Sea)
Mackerel	88% (£37.2 m)	?
Herring	11% (£ 4.5 m)	↑ + 94 %
Other species	1% (£0.6 m)	----

The herring quota had been roughly doubled for 2012, reflecting a large improvement in the perceived state of the stock, although this species accounts for a relatively small proportion of the Shetland pelagic fleet's catch.

Given the on-going dispute with Iceland and Faroe which have unilaterally claimed substantial mackerel quotas in the last three years, no formal mackerel quota has been set for 2012. A provisional guideline quota has been set at 80% of last year's quota to allow the 2012 mackerel fishery to start, but the total amount of mackerel that local pelagic vessels will ultimately be able to catch in 2012 will depend on the outcome of the on-going negotiations with Iceland and Faroe.

There were indications towards the end of last year that the European Commission was keen to resolve the dispute with Iceland and Faroe and might be willing to concede a share of the EU mackerel quota in order to reach an agreement. (Any such concession would reduce the amount of mackerel quota available to EU and Norwegian fishermen.) However, the Commission has also initiated moves to impose sanctions on Iceland and Faroe if agreement with them is not reached. Any such sanctions are likely to involve restrictions on imports of mackerel from Iceland and Faroe to the EU.

The next round of negotiations between the EU and Norway and Iceland and Faroe is scheduled to be held in January.

Further Information

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

Ian R. Napier

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