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SNP MEP calls for mackerel mediation

Press release from Ian Hudghton MEP

SNP President and MEP **Ian Hudghton** has intervened in the dispute between the EU and Iceland over mackerel fishing quotas in the North Atlantic.

Since 2010, Iceland has unilaterally imposed quotas for mackerel fishing, which had traditionally been agreed jointly with the EU, Iceland, Norway and the Faroe Islands. This has seen Iceland award itself a substantially higher allocation of mackerel stocks which are economically very important for Scotland's fishing industry.

The European Parliament's Fisheries Committee asked Europe's Fisheries Commissioner, Maria Damanaki, to appear before the European Parliament to answer questions on the matter. Ms Damanaki was challenged about the European Commission's failure to implement trade sanctions against Iceland, as recommended by the European Parliament.

Ian Hudghton intervened in the debate and proposed appointing an international mediator, as previously suggested by the Scottish Fisheries Minister.

Speaking in the debate, Mr Hudghton said:

"It is frustrating that we are still in an impasse on mackerel. Mackerel is economically a very valuable stock to Scotland. It is frustrating that European regulation is all-powerful when it comes to restricting the activities of our own fishermen, and yet the Commission seems powerless to help us in this mackerel dispute."

"The Fisheries Minister of Scotland has suggested that an international mediator be appointed to help broker an agreement, ending the dispute in an objective and neutral way. I hope that the Commission will pursue that constructive suggestion with a view to getting all parties back around the negotiating table."

The Commissioner accepted that this was a very important issue with serious consequences. She shared our concerns but was required to carefully consider legal and other issues before proceeding to sanctions with regard to mackerel. She did however say that the situation with herring presented more legal clarity and that the Commission would very soon be moving forward with trade sanctions against the Faroe Islands with regard to Atlanto-Scandian herring.

BELOW FOR INFORMATION IS THE FULL TEXT OF THE WRITTEN QUESTION TO THE EU COMMISSION

Mackerel stocks in the North East Atlantic have traditionally been managed through the Coastal States Agreement between the EU, the Faroe Islands, Iceland and Norway. Since 2010 the Faroe Islands and Iceland have established unilateral quotas.

Since then, the Faroe Islands have unilaterally increased their share of mackerel from 4.6 % in 2009 to over 23 % in 2012. The Faroe Islands will set a quota of over 156 000 tonnes for 2013, including a carry-over of 30 000t from 2012.

Iceland has unilaterally increased its share from 1 % in 2006 to 23 % in 2012, going from 4 200t to 150 000t. This year, Iceland has set a unilateral quota of 123 000t. The 2013 unilateral quotas set by both countries represent over 51 % of the recommended total catch advised by the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES).

Also, the Faroe Islands have this year withdrawn from the Coastal States Agreement on Atlanto-Scandian herring and have indicated that they intend to increase significantly their share of this stock. The EU pelagic sector is suffering large economic losses as a result of this irresponsible behaviour.

In 2012 Parliament adopted a new regulation aimed at preventing overfishing. To date, the Commission has failed to implement these new measures against the Faroe Islands and Iceland.

1. In October 2012 Parliament and the Council gave a very strong political mandate to the Commission to enact a trade sanction mechanism in the case of unsustainable fishing by third countries. When will the Commission respect this mandate and issue trade measures against Iceland and the Faroe Islands in the abovementioned case in an effort to stop this irresponsible behaviour?
2. Is it correct that the Commission's legal service is still verifying the requirements for trade measures against Iceland and the Faroe Islands? If so, can the Commission outline what specific requirements are under review? When will this process be finalised?
3. What action does the Commission plan to take to stop the unsustainable and irresponsible fishing of mackerel stocks by Iceland and the Faroe Islands if it decides not to implement trade measures immediately?
4. Given that the Faroe Islands have left the Coastal States Agreement on Atlanto-Scandian herring and have signalled their intention of unilaterally and significantly increasing their share – which goes against the scientific advice and will put a declining stock in jeopardy – what is the Commission's strategy regarding such unacceptable behaviour and what measures will it put in place?

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Ian Hudghton

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