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European Commission support for fish discards

An EFA press release by SNP MEP Ian Hudghton

"CURRENT SYSTEM CAN'T GO ON" - SNP

SNP President **Ian Hudghton** MEP has today (Friday) condemned the European Commission for attempting to maintain rules which require Scottish fishermen to throw marketable fish back into the sea. The criticism comes ahead of an important vote in the European Parliament next week.

The Commission has recently gained much press coverage for stating that it intends to eliminate the practice of discarding fish in EU waters.

However, at the same time they are attempting to extend emergency measures affecting West of Scotland waters for a further 18 months. These measures require fishermen to discard vast quantities of fish.

The Scottish government - with the backing of ministers at Westminster - have attempted to modify the rules to reduce discards. Despite this, the Commission are intent on retaining the current failed system until 2013.

Mr Hudghton commented:

"Public outrage has forced the Commission to acknowledge the discards problem and in recent weeks they've indicated that they'll do something about it. Fishermen themselves hate having to throw perfectly good fish back over the side and would welcome a more sustainable system.

"The Commission however seems to have failed the very first test. In seeking to extend supposedly emergency measures by a further 18 months they are ensuring that fishermen will have to stick to the same failed policies until at least the end of next year.

"The Scottish government and fishermen themselves have suggested modifications to the existing rules - modifications which would reduce discards.

"The Westminster government - which isn't always on the side of Scotland's fishermen - have fully backed the Scottish position.

"However, the Commission are refusing to budge and insist upon business as usual.

"Scotland's fishermen have been at the forefront of promoting new, sustainable fishing techniques. The Scottish government has been instrumental in ensuring these schemes get EU recognition.

"However, the Commission's continuing blinkered attitude demonstrates yet again why powers must be removed from the centre in Brussels - and returned to where it matters."

Notes for editors

- * The emergency measures relating to fishing were originally drafted in 2009 and were intended to last from January 2010 to June 2011.
- * The Commission are intending to extend these until December 2012.
- * The measures require fishermen to discard fish for which they do not have a quota.
- * Simple amendments could reduce discards and help promote Scotland's scallop fishing industry. The Commission are refusing to accept these amendments.

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