



EU AND UK AGREE ON FISHERIES ACCESS AFTER LATE SCRAMBLE

The EU and the U.K. have agreed on a transition period until June 2026 to switch from the current quota shares in U.K. waters to new quota shares as part of the deal struck on their future relationship Thursday.

Fisheries were one of the main sticking points in the negotiations. The future division of quota had to be negotiated directly by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson and even led to extra hours of delay on Thursday as talks touched on the figures on which the fisheries deal was based, according to several EU officials.

Both sides finally agreed on a 25 percent cut in the share of fish caught by EU vessels in U.K. waters, according to an EU official. That's a compromise for both sides, as the EU initially wanted to maintain its current access but then compromised to a 25 percent cut. The U.K. wanted to see a 60 percent cut.

After the transition period, there will be annual negotiations to decide on the volume of fish the other party can catch in each other's waters, which was a demand from the U.K.

For Brussels, it was important that the EU could cross-retaliate if London didn't live up to its fish promises.

The agreement includes arrangements for compensatory measures if one side decides not to grant access to its waters or breaches its obligations. In that case, the other party could take compensatory measures, such as closing its waters or imposing tariffs on fisheries products.

Energy connection

According to an EU official, there is also a link with the energy chapter of the deal. If the U.K. denies the EU access to its waters after the transition period, Brussels could decide not to prolong the agreements made in the energy chapter. There is also the possibility of safeguard measures, but they have to be proportionate to the economic and social impact caused by the actions and will be arbitrated by an independent tribunal.

In a first reaction, fisheries organisations on both sides of the Channel objected to the deal.

DISCARDS AMOUNT TO ABOUT A QUARTER OF THE TOTAL MARINE CATCH

Discards are things that are cast aside or given up - but they are not necessarily worthless. Every year, an estimated 20 million tonnes of fish, approximately a quarter of the total marine catch, are discarded.

Discarding takes place because, in the course of fishing, many species other than the target species are often caught. This by-catch is usually discarded at sea unless it is worth keeping or dumping at sea is expressly forbidden.

When the by-catch consists of a small proportion of mature specimens from healthy stocks, relatively little damage is done, but when it consists of juveniles of commercial species it may be quite damaging.

Apart from the loss of a massive amount of potentially valuable food, the incidental capture of dolphins in tuna purse seine nets, turtles in shrimp trawls and marine mammals, birds, turtles and fish in high-seas squid driftnets has led to widespread public concern.



While the by-catch arises primarily because fishing gears and practices do not selectively target the desired size and species, the reason for discarding part of the catch is generally economic. If the cost of bringing fish to market is greater than its market value, there is every incentive to dump it at sea. Similarly, where a fishing vessel has limited holding capacity, low-value species are discarded in favour of the high-value ones, a practice known as 'high-grading'.

Setting minimum landing sizes to reduce the capture of juvenile fish has led to the discarding of undersized fish. Similarly, output controls such as the use of catch quotas can encourage several things: discarding fish to stay within the quota, high-grading, and price dumping of all or part of the catch when market prices fall in order to save the quota for when prices improve.

CURRENT CONSERVATION MEASURES AT COMMUNITY LEVEL IN THE EU

Exploitation of stocks is being addressed by reducing fleet capacity through MAGPs (Multi Annual Guidance Programmes) and time spent fishing, and also by imposing restrictions on catches, TACs (Total Allowable Catches) by stock broken down into national quotas.

Technical measures have also been introduced to prevent the catching of undersized fish.

These measures include:

- Increasing net mesh sizes to allow small fish to escape.
- Using more selective gear to avoid catching non-target species.
- Banning fishing at certain periods in "nursery" ground where immature fish are predominant.
- Fixing minimum sizes below which landings and marketing are banned.

Minimum mesh sizes were set for different zones, but this has been simplified to an uniform mesh size in Northern waters of 100 mm and 70 mm in Southern waters. As always the problem is one of enforcement, and agreement was not reached that one size of net only could be carried on board. A compromise limiting the combination of net-sizes that can be kept on board was reached.

Trawling is the most widely used form of fishing and often the most devastating for the effect on immature fish and non-target species. It is essential that the mesh sizes are large enough, particularly at the cod end of the net, that the meshes are properly open, and that the newly required panels of square-meshed netting are placed in such a way in the upper part of the net, slightly before the cod end, so that the meshes cannot close. These technical measures, properly implemented, should make a considerable contribution to reducing bycatches, and therefore discards.

INNOVATIVE METHODS TO PRESERVE PELAGIC FISH SPECIES

Pelagic fish species, such as anchovies, sardines, mackerel, tuna, shad and menhaden are all valuable as food sources. The pelagic raw material is highly susceptible to degradation (quality loss) during storage. Since the fisheries for many of the pelagic species are seasonal, this leads to a need for efficient preservation methods. The composition and stability of pelagic fish are also varying with both the seasons and fishing ground. This is also challenging with regard to finding efficient preservation methods.



Freezing and frozen storage of mackerel have been shown to preserve the lipid quality while proteins are oxidised after long time storage. This could lead to reduced raw material quality, such as reduced water holding capacity.

Fresh fish is usually transported and sold on flaked ice, resulting in a temperature of close to 0°C. Cooling and refrigeration will increase shelf life by slowing down both microbial growth and enzymatic reactions, but it will not kill microorganisms or stop enzymatic reactions.

Today, consumers want healthy food products that are safe to eat, have a high nutritional value and also a very high sensory quality, are fresh-like and are free of or have a reduced content of chemical additives.

This has led to an increased interest in new non-thermal food processing and preservation methods. One of the most promising of these methods is high-pressure processing. This is a process where the food or the raw material is treated with pressures from 200 to 800 MPa at temperatures between 5°C and 35°C. HPP leads to inactivation of microbes because of changes to the cell membrane, denaturation of proteins. This includes the inactivation of enzymes and changes to the structure of the cell.