

The Fisheries Bill:

The case for fairer fishing

Fishing opportunities should be allocated on the basis of transparent and objective environmental, social and economic criteria in a way that encourages the most sustainable fishing practices.

Fisheries are a public resource, and fishing opportunities should be managed in a way that maximises public benefits through environmental protection, and social and economic development. As such, the UK government should be planning now to develop a robust quota management system with policies that foster equitable and sustainable allocation of quota. The UK should refer to the 2014 reforms to the Common Fisheries Policy, which established environmental, social and economic criteria to be used in the allocation of fishing opportunities.

Brexit is an opportunity to achieve important socioeconomic objectives within world-leading fisheries policy. This is particularly important for the small scale fleet (SSF), as existing policies have traditionally catered to larger scale operators. Therefore, through broad consultation, national UK administrations should develop transparent and objective quota allocation criteria as part of a framework to incentivise and reward sustainable fishing.

There is no off-the-shelf model for a quota system structured according to these criteria; however, best practice examples can guide the UK as it develops a new system. The following evidence based examples should be referenced to guide the evaluation and implementation of these criteria:

The California Fisheries Fund (CFF): Working with The Nature Conservancy, the CFF has supported US West Coast fisheries by allocating quota to local, sustainable fishing operations. The fund has raised close to \$4.8 million over nine years, helping young fishermen to enter the industry, supporting community quota banks and lending to a diverse fishing fleet. Setting aside a portion of quota to support a similar 'reward scheme' could encourage more vessels to fish sustainably, with greater rewards for more ambitious performance targets, such as adopting low impact, sustainable gear.

The Danish quota management system: The Danish quota management system developed a new entrant programme by a) ensuring shares are transferable so that new entrants can purchase them on the market, b) setting up Fishfund as a set-aside of quota shares for new entrants who needed investment in the fishery, such as purchasing a new vessel, and c) allowing new entrants to join one Fishpool to access pooled quota for a fee. These programmes have all supported the participation of younger fishers, and those who did not receive initial allocations.

There are a number of approaches the UK government could consider to implement a more equitable and sustainable quota allocation policy, such as:

- Limiting the total quota any one operator can acquire and prohibiting the 'upward transfer' or purchase of quota by large scale vessels from small scale vessels and community groups. Norway operates a one way valve system: in addition to having small scale quota pools, it enables small scale operators to acquire quota from larger vessels but prohibits the reverse to take place.

- Setting aside a portion of quota to reward vessels that demonstrate low impact, more selective, energy efficient fishing methods. As in the California Fishing Fund example, a portion of invested or national quota could be allocated to community quota pools, aimed at achieving sustainable fishing while at the same time supporting local, fishing-dependent communities.
- Breaking up larger Fixed Quota Allocation (FQA) units, which in some cases are too large for the small scale sector to access, into smaller bundles that could be accessed at an individual or community level. This would help small scale operators get on the 'quota ladder', as well as attract prospective fishers to the industry.

These approaches should be trialled as 'on the water' pilots to demonstrate the adoption of more sustainable practices at scale, as well as setting ambitious performance targets. This could provide best practice examples for the allocation process, helping to balance the system and achieve greater equity for the small scale fleet.

Risk

If future UK fishing policy does not develop objectives in favour of quota allocation against environmental, social and economic criteria, there is a risk of increased discards, low profits and the deterioration of once vibrant coastal communities. The UK must be ambitious and develop a system that rewards local, low impact fishing that works for fishers and the environment, and benefits the wider public.

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