

## **Briefing for MPs for Report stage of the Fisheries Bill – international leadership or a missed opportunity?**

8 October 2020

There is still time to seize the chance to put in place fisheries legislation that will set a committed direction on reversing biodiversity decline. In doing so, we will make our seas more resilient, rebuild stocks that support thriving coastal communities and provide sustainable seafood options for consumers. Small adjustments to the Fisheries Bill could make good on the government's environmental commitments and deliver the change that is urgently needed. This is a once in a generation chance to recover our seas and protect seafood businesses.

### **Greener UK's priorities for Report stage**

**We support amendment 2 on the sustainability objective.** This seeks to reinstate the amendment made to Clauses 1(2)(a) and 1(3) of the bill in the House of Lords which was removed by the government at Committee stage. These changes, which attracted strong cross party support in the Lords, would ensure that fisheries management decisions are environmentally sustainable in both the short and long term.

**We would be grateful if MPs could ask the Minister to act urgently to recover depleted fish stocks.** It would be helpful if the Report stage debate resulted in an explicit commitment from the UK government to work with its counterparts in the devolved administrations to put in place plans in 2021 to recover the most depleted fish stocks<sup>1</sup>. This should include the roll out of Remote Electronic Monitoring with cameras (REM) on vessels fishing these stocks. The Scottish Fisheries Minister has indicated his government's support for the adoption of REM on larger vessels. It would be helpful if the Fisheries Minister set out a clear direction of travel on this important issue, as a visible sign of progress towards the four nation approach needed to bring about the recovery of these stocks.

### **The case for change**

The UK government fisheries white paper<sup>2</sup> recognised that healthy fish stocks are the first step to vibrant commercial and recreational fishing industries, and prioritises a healthy marine environment. Only 58-68% of UK fish stocks, for which we have data, are fished at sustainable levels, and several fish stocks in our waters are badly depleted and in need of decisive and urgent action. We are failing to meet 11 of the 15 indicators of ocean health in UK waters and, by the government's own admission, the 2020 target for Good Environmental Status "*will not be achieved for many years unless there are further improvements to fisheries management measures*".<sup>3</sup>

### **Business support**

There is strong support for the changes from a range of stakeholders, including a large number of those who buy and sell UK fish. In September, 22 major supermarkets and seafood businesses sent a [letter](#) to the Secretary of State urging him to ensure that the bill included legally binding commitments on sustainable fishing limits and robust monitoring and enforcement, including the roll out of cameras. They noted that *'ineffective management of our fisheries limits the ability of*

*UK fishing communities to sell to responsible UK businesses’.*

## **Making environmental sustainability count**

There has never been a more important time to improve the way our fisheries are managed, and to rebalance fisheries management discussions to ensure that environmental sustainability is a key part of every decision. Clauses 1(2)(a) and 1(3) of the Bill were amended in the Lords to do just that and amendment 2 seeks to reinstate these important changes. They would make sustainability the prime objective of the bill and ensure that fisheries management decisions do not compromise environmental sustainability in both the short and long term.

Given the poor status of our seas and the overfished status of 30-40% of our fish stocks, only viewing environmental sustainability as a long term aspiration has resulted in other considerations being continuously put first and the recovery of our fish stocks never materialising. This amendment would ensure that fisheries management decisions are made through a lens of environmental sustainability that will result in long and short term benefits. This would, in turn, allow fish stocks to recover and thrive, result in a more resilient and productive marine ecosystem and lead to increased long term catches, industry profits and benefits for coastal communities. The amendment passed in the House of Lords is particularly important given the existence of the wide ranging opt out provisions in clauses 7 and 10 of the bill, which will allow authorities to depart from policy statements or management plans on the basis of socio economic considerations.

The Secretary of State suggested in the Second Reading debate that the Lords’ amendments would create a hierarchy in the objectives and that *“environmental objectives have already been given a degree of priority through the requirement for fisheries management plans”*. These comments must be seen in a context in which the UK is currently not achieving sustainable fisheries management and in which decisions which give priority to short term economic factors over environmental factors have been taken all too frequently. Fishing quotas continue to be set above scientifically recommended sustainable levels.

**In summary, Greener UK believes that the Fisheries Bill must be amended if the government is to deliver its ambition of having world leading environmental laws. This could be achieved by accepting the principle of amendment 2 and providing assurances on urgent action to address depleted stocks. As the UK’s first major piece of domestic fisheries policy in over 40 years, this is a once in a generation opportunity to rethink the way we manage our fisheries.**

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Those below their lower biomass limit including West of Scotland cod and whiting, Irish Sea whiting, North Sea cod, Celtic Sea cod and herring stocks in the Celtic Sea, southern Irish Sea and West of Scotland.

<sup>2</sup> Defra, 2018. Sustainable fisheries for future generations [here](#)

<sup>3</sup> Marine strategy part one: UK updated assessment and Good Environmental Status. DEFRA, 2019 [here](#)

Greener UK is a coalition of 13 major environmental organisations united in the belief that leaving the EU is a pivotal moment to restore and enhance the UK's environment.

Greener UK is working in partnership with the New Economics Foundation and Oceana.

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