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Scottish Government quota consultation
Area 1-B (South)
Victoria Quay
Edinburgh EH6 6QQ

SUBMISSION TO THE CONSULTATION ON THE ALLOCATION OF SCOTTISH FISH QUOTAS

Animal Concern would like to see a radical change in the way fish quotas are allocated amongst Scottish vessels. We would like to see the quota system used to encourage vessels which cause least damage to the marine environment by the use of gear which allows undersized fish to escape or be returned unharmed, avoids by-catch of other species of fish, marine mammals and birds and which causes minimum damage to the seabed.

Quotas could be used to turn the tide against massive industrial trawlers employing a minimum number of foreign crew under conditions bordering on slave labour to catch huge quantities of fish. Instead quotas for scarce and valuable fish stocks should be divided in such a way as to encourage smaller vessels employing more local fishermen to catch truly sustainable quantities of better quality fish in an environmentally friendly manner.

We urge the Scottish Government to adopt a conservation led stance when it comes to dealing with the EU on the matter of fishing quotas for Scottish vessels. We have been concerned in the past to see our Environment Minister lobbying for increased landings for the Scottish fleet when the most sensible approach would be to lobby for an overall reduction in catch quotas throughout EU controlled waters.

It is not long since dozens of Scottish skippers were found guilty of being part of one of the biggest environmentally damaging and financially lucrative organised crime syndicates ever seen in the United Kingdom. Hundreds of millions of tonnes of conservation quota busting fish were illegally landed using sophisticated clandestine measures to avoid detection by the authorities. Over £100,000,000 of illegal profits were made yet no-one was jailed, no vessels confiscated and only a fraction of the illegal earnings were recouped in fines and asset seizures.

Fishing organisations have condemned quotas as being set too low and have claimed that contrary to scientific advice stocks, especially mackerel stocks, are recovering well. This does not ring true with anglers in areas where mackerel numbers have dropped dramatically and the size of the fish caught is much smaller than a few years ago.

Fish stocks are on a knife edge and the Scottish Government should take the lead in fighting to protect those stocks by lobbying for a radical reduction in quotas throughout Europe and a move away from industrial trawling on an unsustainable level.

Before embarking on an exercise to continue fighting for increased catch limits and then dividing those quotas much as before we ask the Scottish Government to instead lead the way in a radical move to protect and conserve fish stocks. When talking about fishing and aquaculture our Government Ministers use the word “sustainable” frequently but without any justification. They have a chance to change that and do something to help create real long-term sustainability in the fishing industry.

John F. Robins, for Animal Concern and Save Our Seals Fund, 28th November 2014.
