

EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement

Seventh meeting of the Specialised Committee on Fisheries

Friday 22 September 2023 | 09:00 – 12:00 BST / 10:00 – 13:00 CEST

London & Virtual (UK host)

Minutes of the meeting

Item 1: Opening of the Specialised Committee and adoption of the agenda

The UK as host welcomed both Delegations to the seventh meeting of the Specialised Committee on Fisheries (SCF). In opening remarks, both Parties noted the significant progress that the SCF has made in 2023 and looked ahead to continuing that cooperation in 2024. The Parties adopted the provisional agenda for the meeting.

Item 2: Fisheries management and conservation

a) Update on fisheries management measures

The UK noted recent updates on its work on the first tranche of Fisheries Management Plans, reform of the Landing Obligation, and remote electronic monitoring (REM) including the briefing session provided for the Commission and Member States. The UK then provided a further update on its work on Marine Protected Areas and Highly Protected Marine Areas and noted the open consultation by the Scottish Government on sandeel fishing.

The EU recalled recently notified discard plans and updated on upcoming measures regarding Western Red Seabream, technical measures for Western waters, technical measures for Atlantic Halibut for Skagerrak. The EU noted again the recently adopted Control Regulations.

The Parties exchanged separate views on the UK's sandeel consultation. The EU noted that the Parties were still awaiting a response from ICES following their joint request on forage fish.

b) TAC alignment on Whiting (Celtic Sea) and Plaice (English Channel)

The Parties recalled their obligation under Article 504 of the TCA to review the alignment of management areas and the assessment units used by ICES for these stocks. The Parties agreed to the need for technical discussions ideally prior to annual consultations with the aim of reaching agreement on a technical level.

c) Celtic Sea technical measures

The Parties noted the constructive technical discussions that had taken place over the summer following the conclusion of the joint data collation exercise. They emphasised the importance of progressing this work and agreed to prioritising this issue in 2024.

Item 3: Fishing opportunities, including scientific coordination

a) Guidelines for setting TACs for Special Stocks

Both Parties noted ongoing discussions on this topic. Both Parties agreed on the importance of having guidelines, whilst acknowledging that use of any guidelines remains a contingency. The Parties reflected on the challenges of establishing these guidelines and ensuring that they are in line with their respective legal frameworks. The Parties agreed that talks should continue.

b) Review of footnotes

The Parties noted recent agreement in technical discussions to complete a data exchange on utilisation of relevant flexibility footnotes, and that the exchange would take place shortly. The Parties agreed that this was a significant step in progressing this work and looked forward to continuing discussions.

c) Inter-annual flexibilities

The Parties noted the commitment in the 2023 Written Record to discuss inter-annual flexibilities and agreed to exchange data on what each Party has banked and borrowed between 2022 and 2023.

d) Skates and rays including small-eyed ray

The Parties recalled how the 2023 Written Record recognised that the current group TAC management approach for skates and rays provides limited protection for vulnerable stocks and that work on developing alternatives was needed. The Parties welcomed a joint roadmap for how to progress this work in 2024. The Parties also discussed the possibility of a scientific observation data collection programme for small eyed ray in area 7e and agreed to consider this further as part of annual consultations.

e) Western Red Seabream

The Parties recalled agreement in the 2023 Written Record on the need to improve scientific information for this stock. The EU noted their intention to extend existing technical measures and the UK welcomed a further discussion on how effective those measures have been to date, with a view to informing the annual consultations.

f) Roundnose grenadier

The Parties noted again that ICES had responded to their joint request on the allocation of headline advice for this stock to the associated TAC management areas. Both Parties have been working internally to reflect this response and agreed to technical discussions on this issue prior to annual consultations.

g) Black scabbardfish

The Parties noted the need for technical discussions ahead of annual consultations to consider the best method for interpreting ICES advice.

h) Spurdog

The Parties noted the 2023 Written Record commitment to formally review catch data for spurdog as part of robust monitoring mechanisms for this stock and exchanged quota update information for their respective fleets. The Parties agreed to continued engagement to ensure effective monitoring and conservation and agreed to the value of further technical discussions following the conclusion of a research project led by Cefas.

Item 4: Non-quota stocks

a) Multi-year strategy for Channel king scallops

The Parties noted their commitment to progressing technical discussions on a multi-year strategy for Channel king scallops and that this could be a priority for 2024. They agreed that the first step would be exchanging information on existing fisheries management measures on both sides.

b) Seabass shore-netting

The Parties acknowledged that this was a long-standing commitment, since 2021, and that technical discussions were needed. The UK noted that the Fisheries Management Plan on seabass that was out for consultation included a proposal to review the practice of shore-based netting and welcomed contributions to that consultation.

Item 5: Landings data exchanges

The Parties acknowledged continued constructive discussions on this issue. The Parties remain committed to making progress on this area, mindful of broader commitments to data transparency.

Item 6: Control and enforcement

The Parties noted constructive technical discussions in recent months and intention to bring a fuller update to the next session of the Specialised Committee on Fisheries.

Item 7: Any Other Business (AOB)

Under AOB, the EU noted the importance of stable and predictable access arrangements following the end of the adjustment period in 2026 and asked to begin discussions on how to operationalise this soon.

Item 9: Closure

[Approved by the Joint Secretariat of the Specialised Committee on Fisheries]

Annex 1: List of participants in the sixth meeting of the Specialised Committee on Fisheries

EU delegation

- EU Co-Chair of the Specialised Committee on Fisheries
- European Commission Officials
- Delegation of the European Union to the UK Official
- Representatives of EU Member States

UK delegation

- UK Co-Chair of the Specialised Committee on Fisheries
- UK Government Officials from DEFRA and FCDO
- Scottish Government Officials
- Northern Ireland Executive Officials
- Welsh Government Officials
- Isle of Man Government Officials
- Government of Jersey Officials
- States of Guernsey Officials
- Marine Management Organisation Officials
- UK Mission to the European Union Officials

Annex 2: Indicative roadmap - Skates and rays

The UK and EU recognise that the current TAC management for skates and rays approach provides limited protection for vulnerable stocks and for possible under-exploitation of healthy stocks and agreed to jointly develop alternatives to the current group TACs for those species.

An alternative approach to the management of fisheries on skates and rays will take time to deliver and the Parties agreed to the development of a roadmap in 2023 to outline their shared ambitions and set direction for the work over the coming years. It is an outline only and is subject to change and improvements in the future.

Objectives

Reflecting the work that has already been undertaken on the management of fisheries on skates and rays by the Parties, an alternative approach should:

1. Provide better management for the fishery:
 - Reduce the risk of overfishing of individual biological stocks as compared to the catches advised by ICES, whilst also supporting the sustainable exploitation of healthy stocks.
 - Provide protection for vulnerable stocks.
2. Support implementation:
 - Identify choke risks and support the sector by considering mitigation approaches.
 - Reflect the realities of operating in the fishery including the spatial and temporal distribution of fish and identification issues.
 - Give industry time to adapt to a new approach, by a process of staged introduction and ongoing review of implementation.
3. Reflect changes in knowledge and support the science:
 - Reflect recent changes in assessment models used by ICES.
 - Allow for flexibility to accommodate future (including anticipated) underlying changes in the science and annual variations in advice.
 - Input from stakeholders (commercial fishers, recreational fishers, NGOs) to improve the science – including industry-generated data to enhance assessments.
 - Improve scientific evidence, and support more robust assessments, for more stocks i.e. increase availability of evidence for data-limited stocks.
 - Develop the science and its use to support decision-making on including or removing species from the prohibited species list.

A secondary purpose of this roadmap is to prevent duplication of effort by the Parties in this process.

Roadmap

The work already undertaken by the Parties included assessment of potential alternatives to the group TACs. In early 2024 the Parties will convene a series of workshops to produce a shortlist of potential alternatives, assessed against the listed objectives above (though not excluding other considerations). This process will include the consideration of any additional needs of scientific information to support the work, to be carried forward jointly. Periodic updates will be given to the SCF/WG on the progress of this work.

The Parties will seek to develop and agree an initial set of changes to the group TAC approach, with a view to having them implemented as soon as practicable.