

## **Iceland's Right to Mackerel Fisheries**

Iceland has been fortunate enough to be favoured with rich fisheries resources, which the country has utilised in a responsible and sustainable manner. All the main commercial fish stocks in Icelandic waters are in good shape and we have reaped due rewards from resisting the temptation to fish in excess of scientific advice. Rather, we have followed long-term catch rules based on the principle of sustainable utilisation, even in economically difficult times.

In recent years, mackerel has to an increasing extent migrated into Iceland's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and feeds here for several months each year. The food consumed by the mackerel is no longer available for other species, which could result in Iceland having to limit its fishing of other commercial stocks. The Marine Research Institutes of Iceland, Norway and the Faroe Islands have conducted extensive research which indicates that the biomass of mackerel within the Icelandic EEZ during the feeding season was around 1.1 million metric tons in both 2010 and 2011 and the outcome for 2012 was even higher, around 1.5 million tons. When considering the estimated weight increase of mackerel within the Icelandic EEZ (43%-55% during May-September), it is evident that the food consumption of mackerel within the zone is likely to amount to some 3 million tons this summer.

There is clear evidence that mackerel is now maturing and spawning within the Icelandic jurisdiction. During July-August 2012, an international expedition in Icelandic waters still confirmed earlier observations of major mackerel abundance in the area as earlier said. The Icelandic public and foreign tourists have also become well aware of the presence of mackerel in Icelandic waters as it is possible to fish mackerel with a rod in harbors all around the island. Thus, there are no signs of a decline in the migration of the stock in Icelandic waters and attempts to distribute information to that effect contrary to scientific results are surprising.

As a coastal State, Iceland has a clear right under international law to fish from the mackerel stock. This is clearly spelled out in the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and the UN Fish Stocks Agreement. It should be pointed out that Icelandic vessels have fished mackerel almost exclusively within the Icelandic EEZ.

It is of vital importance that the coastal States, Iceland, the EU, Norway and the Faroe Islands, reach an agreement on the management of mackerel fisheries, including the allocation of quotas, as soon as possible. The coastal States carry a joint responsibility for preventing overfishing from the stock and ensuring sustainable fisheries. One can not point the finger at one or two of the parties in this respect – they must all contribute to reaching an agreement.

In order to reach a fair solution, the legitimate interests of all the coastal States must be taken into account. Obviously, all the parties benefit from the feeding of mackerel within the Icelandic EEZ and scientific findings strengthen Iceland's position in the negotiations. Iceland puts emphasis on ensuring a fair share for Icelandic vessels in the mackerel fisheries, taking into account the fact that the mackerel stock migrates in large abundance into the Icelandic zone for feeding. An agreement must be reached at the negotiating table solely on the basis of professional and rational discussion. Any threats, such as those related to trade sanctions, will not contribute to reaching a solution, but quite the contrary.

Finally, it should be stressed that fisheries are to Iceland what petroleum is to Norway, wine to France, motor vehicles to Germany and the City to the UK. Would you not expect the leaders of these countries to defend their rights where such key national interests were at stake?

We need to resolve the mackerel dispute at the negotiating table in a civilized manner based on objective factors and the principles of sustainable fisheries.

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