

EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement

Sixth meeting of the Specialised Committee on Fisheries

Tuesday 27 June 2023 | 10:00 – 13:00 CEST / 09:00 – 12:00 BST

Brussels & Virtual (EU host)

Minutes of the meeting

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

The EU as host welcomed both Delegations to the fifth meeting of the Specialised Committee on Fisheries (SCF). In opening remarks, both Parties recognised the importance of cooperation between the Parties for sustainable management of stocks in the northeast Atlantic, and for ensuring a smooth operating environment for vessels. The Parties adopted the provisional agenda for the meeting.

Item 2: Fisheries management and conservation

a) Update on fisheries management measures

The EU provided an update on its revision of the Control Regulation, the Action Plan on protecting and restoring marine ecosystems for sustainable and resilient fisheries, the report on the Common fisheries policy, and the Commission's intention to conduct an evaluation of the Landing Obligation.

The UK provided an update on its work on the first tranche of Fisheries Management Plans, reform of the Landing Obligation, remote electronic monitoring (REM), and Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and Highly Protected Marine Areas (HMPAs).

The Parties exchanged views on these initiatives.

b) Mechanism for transfers of fishing opportunities

The Parties recalled that Article 498(8) of the TCA sets out that the Parties shall set up a mechanism for voluntary in-year transfers of fishing opportunities between the Parties, to take place each year, and that the SCF shall decide on the details of this mechanism. The Parties noted constructive discussions between them with a view to adopting a Decision of the SCF establishing such a mechanism, based on the principles on which swaps have taken place since 2021. The Parties noted that the content of such Decision was agreed at technical level, pending completion of internal procedures on both sides. The draft Decision is subject to adoption, in principle via written procedure.

c) Guidelines on notifications under Article 496(3) of the TCA

The Parties recalled that discussions on this topic have been taking place since the first meeting of the SCF in July 2021. The Parties informed that the content of the draft Recommendation of the SCF setting out Guidelines for Notifications was agreed at

technical level, pending completion of internal procedures on both sides. The Recommendation is subject to adoption by the SCF in principle via written procedure.

d) TAC alignment

a. Lemon sole & witch and turbot & brill

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 acknowledged the constructive discussions on this topic, with a view to adopting a Recommendation of the SCF on TAC alignment of these stocks. The Parties noted that the content of such Recommendation was agreed at technical level, pending completion of internal procedures on both sides, and that the draft Recommendation is subject to adoption by the SCF, in principle via written procedure.

b. 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 two further stocks. Following on from the release of the advice at the end of March, both Parties noted the importance of progressing discussions on this point and agreed to continue discussions in the next meeting of the EU-UK Working Group on Fisheries.

e) Celtic Sea technical measures

The Parties concurred on the importance of work on this topic and noted the good work to date in 2023. The Parties noted that the work on data collation has taken longer than anticipated due to its complex and technical nature and noted the significant effort by both sides in the exercise. Both Parties hope to finish this work in the coming weeks, with a view to evaluating candidate measures thereafter.

Item 3: Fishing opportunities, including scientific coordination

a) EU-UK annual consultations for 2023 - recap

As this was the first SCF meeting of 2023, the Parties noted the outcomes of the fisheries consultations between the United Kingdom and the European Union for 2023 (which also covers some stocks for 2023 and 2024), which took place pursuant to Article 498 of the TCA, and the Written Record of which is annexed to these minutes in line with Article 508(2)(a).

b) Guidelines for setting TACs for Special Stocks

Both Parties noted constructive exchanges to date on this topic. Both Parties agreed on the importance of having guidelines, whilst acknowledging that use of any guidelines remain a contingency. The Parties agreed to continue discussions to progress this work which should be carried out in full respect to their respective legal frameworks.

c) Review of footnotes

The Parties acknowledged their commitments in the 2023 Written Record to review the use of inter-area, inter-stock, inter-species and intra-species flexibilities. The Parties noted that as a first step, a list of initial footnotes for review should be finalised, and identification of data needed to support such a review. The Parties agreed to continue discussions on this matter at the next meeting of the EU-UK Working Group on Fisheries.

d) Skates & Rays

The Parties recalled the commitment in paragraph 1(m) of the Written Record of fisheries consultations between the United Kingdom and the European Union for 2021 (henceforth 2021 Written Record) that the Parties would develop a joint method for the interpretation of ICES advice for skates and rays.

The Parties acknowledged the technical work over the past year on this issue (informed by UKFSAP advice sheet on Skates and Rays and STECF-22-08 Skates & Rays Management) and welcomed the tabled paper (annexed to minutes) arising from this work setting out a joint method for interpreting ICES advice for the skates and rays group TACs (SRX/07D, SRX/2AC-4, SRX/67AKXD, SRX/89-C.). The Parties also exchanged copies of scientific reports which informed their approach to this work, both of which are annexed to these minutes.

The Parties recalled their discussions at the last WG on the possibility to develop a roadmap for future skates and rays management, and which should consider possible medium to long term alternatives to the current use of skates and rays group TACs.

The Parties also recalled the commitment in paragraph 5(e) of the Written Record of fisheries consultations between the United Kingdom and the European Union for 2021 (henceforth 2021 Written Record) to consider the approach for scientific observation data collection programmes for small eyed ray in area 7e. The Parties agreed to discuss this item at the next meeting of the EU-UK Working Group on Fisheries.

e) Update on ICES requests

a. Whiting (Celtic Sea) and Plaice (English Channel)

The Parties noted the receipt of ICES advice for these requests of 27 March for whiting (Celtic Sea) and 30 March for plaice (English Channel). This advice will feed into the work referred to under item 2(d)(i) of this meeting.

b. Horse mackerel

The Parties noted the commitment under paragraph 1(o) of the 2023 Written Record to make a joint request to ICES for an inter-benchmark assessment of the western horse mackerel stock. The request was discussed in the EU-UK Working Group on Fisheries and ICES was consulted on the request thereafter. ICES advised that it could not take this request at that moment and that the benchmark process for the stock is scheduled to be completed in the first half of 2024.

c. Ecosystems-based fisheries management aspects for forage fish species

The Parties noted the commitment under paragraph 6 of the Written Record of fisheries consultations between the Parties about sandeel for 2023, in which they agreed to request ICES to provide further information on how ecosystem considerations, particularly predator-prey interactions and the rebuilding of sensitive higher trophic level species, and other ecosystems-based fisheries management aspects, are factored into the provision of the single stock advice for forage fish species. Such a joint request has been submitted to ICES, from which the Parties are now awaiting a response.

d. Seabass allocation tool

On back of commitments in paragraph 13(h) of the 2023 Written Records, the Parties sent a joint request to ICES to update the seabass allocation tool. The Parties noted such a request was jointly made in 2022 and that ICES advised it could not undertake this work ahead of the next benchmark on seabass. The Parties agreed to follow-up with ICES to arrange a meeting, as suggested by ICES.

e. Stocks with no advice (Celtic Sea saithe, and Western Channel and Bristol Channel herring)

In line with paragraph 5(h) of the 2021 Written Record, the Parties made a joint request in 2022 to ICES seeking scientific advice for these stocks. ICES was not able to positively respond to the request, largely due to lack of basic data and information on the stocks needed for such. The Parties reflected positively on ICES' offer to facilitate a workshop in 2024 to identify what work needs to be done on these elements.

f. Discard survivability exemptions

Under paragraph 11(b) of the Written Record of fisheries consultations between the United Kingdom and the European Union for 2022 (henceforth '2022 Written Record'), the Parties agreed to jointly request ICES to include discard survival estimates in their advice for shared stocks in the future. In 2022, the Parties made such a joint request to ICES concerning a survivability roadmap for 8 stocks, including plaice, sole and turbot. ICES informed that this process can be initiated with a final roadmap being available after the ICES Advisory Committee (ACOM) meeting in March 2024.

g. Roundnose grenadier

Pursuant to paragraph 5(g)(ii) of the 2021 Written Record, in early 2023, the Parties made two requests to ICES on this species, one a non-recurrent technical service request on approaches to apportioning the stock advice into the two TAC management areas, and the other a special advisory request on stock characterisation.

ICES has issued advice for the non-recurrent technical service request, which will inform future management discussions between the Parties.

ICES advised it was not in a position to provide advice based for the special advisory request, as roundnose grenadier is one of the data-limited stocks and requesting information on the spatial structure of the fishery, robust projections of the stock and

elements needed for a robust assessment framework is not feasible given the limited data availability.

h. Mixed fisheries science

In 2022, the EU and UK submitted a joint request to ICES concerning the underlying modelling assumptions used to generate the mixed fisheries scenarios. This request was revised following technical discussions with ICES. The Parties are now awaiting a response from ICES on the revised request.

Item 4: Non-quota stocks

a) Multi-year strategy for Channel king scallops

The Parties recalled the agreement in the SCF meeting of 21 October 2022 to begin work on a multi-year strategy for Channel king scallops in 2023. The Parties reconfirmed this shared objective and noted the importance of kicking off work on this topic. In this context, the Parties agreed to discuss the matter at the next meeting of the EU-UK Working Group on Fisheries.

b) Seabass shore-netting

The Parties recalled that under Article 13(f)(ii) of the 2021 Written Record, they agreed that shore-based commercial netting should be removed from the scope of the general seabass fishing prohibition with certain conditions, and that they agreed to introduce catch reporting for shore-based netting activities and to update each other on progress in the SCF. The Parties agreed that the EU-UK Working Group on Fisheries would be the appropriate forum for such discussions and agreed to take the matter up there.

Item 5: Landings data exchanges

Both Parties noted the progress made in technical discussions and the good working relationships on ensuring the robustness of exchanged landings data. Both Parties noted that updated landings data for non-quota stocks for the period 1 January to 31 December 2022 was provided in the annex to the Written Record of fisheries consultations between the Parties about sandeel for 2023.

Item 6: Control and enforcement

The Parties welcomed constructive technical discussions on control and enforcement cooperation, and acknowledged it is important to formalise control and enforcement arrangements at the SCF. The Parties agreed to continue talks in view of the next meeting of the EU-UK Working Group on Fisheries.

Item 7: Next steps

A meeting of the EU-UK Working Group on Fisheries is foreseen for July and another meeting of the SCF is foreseen for September.

Item 8: Any Other Business (AOB)

Under AOB, the Parties welcomed the implementation of albacore access arrangements, as committed to under paragraph 5 of the 2023 Written Record.

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: Method for interpretation of ICES advice for skates and rays

Table 1

TAC management unit	ICES subarea	Ecoregion
SRX/2AC4-C (North Sea)	2a, 4	North Sea
SRX/7D (Eastern Channel)	7d	North Sea
SRX/67AKXD (Western)	6, 7a-c, e-k	Celtic
SRX/89-C (Southern)	8, 9c	Iberian

- (1) For each ecoregion, advice for implied landings for individual stocks not subject to prohibitions is summed:
- Stocks defined within each ecoregion are listed in Table 2.
 - Stocks that straddle between ecoregions are listed in Table 3.
 - For advice units for which the ICES advice sheet does not include a headline figure for implied landings an average of the past three years of combined UK and EU landings is used¹. These three-year averages do not include catches of prohibited stocks. **Affected stocks are marked with ‘(*)’ in Table 2.**
 - Where a stock definition straddles multiple ecoregions, it is split between them based on the best available evidence. **Affected stocks are marked with ‘(**)’ in Table 2.** In the first instance this will be based on the average ratio of total landings between the two ecoregions for the stock over the fixed period between 2017 and 2021. In the absence of this data the apportionment splits in Table 3 should be used.
 - Where this calculation shows less than 0.5% of catch as being made in an ecoregion, no share will be assigned to that ecoregion. **Affected stocks are marked with ‘(***)’ in Table 3.**
- (2) The Celtic and Iberian ecoregions sums correspond directly to the Western and Southern TAC management units.
- (3) The North Sea ecoregion sum is split between the two TAC management units (North Sea and Eastern Channel) according to the historical TAC ratio as applied in 2021 (Table 4).

¹ Four stocks: *Other skates and rays in Subarea 4 and Divisions 3.a and 7.d* (raj-347d), *Common skate complex in 6–7.a-c,e-k* (rjb.27.67a-ce-k), *Other skates and rays in 6–7.a-c,e-k* (raj. 27.67a-ce-k), *Other skates and rays in Subarea 8 and Division 9.a (Bay of Biscay and Atlantic Iberian waters)* (raj.27.89a).

Table 2. Stocks defined within each ecoregion

Ecoregion	Stocks
North Sea	Other skates and rays in Subarea 4 and Divisions 3.a and 7.d (*) Thornback ray in Subarea 4, and Divisions 3.a and 7.d Blonde ray in Divisions 4.c and 7.d Cuckoo ray in Subarea 4 and Division 3.a Spotted ray in Subarea 4 and Divisions 3.a and 7.d Small-eyed ray in Divisions 7.d-e (**) Blonde ray in Subarea 6 and Division 4.a (**) Sandy ray in 6–7 (**) Shagreen ray in 6–7 (**)
Celtic	Other skates and rays in 6–7.a-c,e-k (*) Common skate complex in 6–7.a-c,e-k (*) Thornback ray in 6 Thornback ray in 7.a, f–g Thornback ray in 7.e Small-eyed ray in 7.f-g Blonde ray in 7.a, f–g Blonde ray in 7.e Spotted ray in 6, 7.b, j Spotted ray in 7a,e-h Undulate ray in 7.b, j Small-eyed ray in Divisions 7.d-e (**) Blonde ray in Subarea 6 and Division 4.a (**) Cuckoo ray in 6, 7, 8.a-b, 8.d (**) Sandy ray in 6–7 (**) Shagreen ray in 6–7 (**)
Iberian	Other skates and rays in Subarea 8 and Division 9.a (*) Thornback ray in 8abd Thornback ray in 8c Thornback ray in 9a Blonde ray in Division 9.a Spotted ray in Subarea 8 Spotted ray in Subarea 9.a Spotted ray in Subarea 4, and Divisions 3.a and 7.d Cuckoo ray in Division 8.c Cuckoo ray in Division 9.a Undulate ray in divisions 8.a–b Undulate ray in division 9.a Cuckoo ray in 6, 7, 8.a-b, 8.d (**)

(*) indicates the application of (1)(c).

(**) indicates the application of (1)(d).

Table 3. Stocks defined across multiple ecoregions

Stock	% apportionment to ecoregion:		
	North Sea	Celtic	Iberian
Small-eyed ray in Divisions 7.d-e	50.00%	50.00%	0
Blonde ray in Subarea 6 and Division 4.a	10.00%	90.00%	0
Cuckoo ray in 6, 7, 8.a-b, 8.d	0	67.60%	32.40%
Sandy ray in 6-7 (***)	0	100%	0
Shagreen ray in 6-7 (***)	0	100%	0

(***) indicates the application of (1)(e).

Table 4. Historical TAC split for North Sea ecoregion

TAC management unit	% of North Sea ecoregion total ²
SRX/2AC4-C (North Sea)	53.31%
SRX/7D (Eastern Channel)	45.23%

² The remaining 1.46% correlates to the SRX/3A-C TAC unit, which is not part of this joint approach.