



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Agriculture, Environment and
Rural Affairs

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Impact of EU Exit on the Fishing Industry:
Northern Ireland Fishermen's Federation

19 January 2021

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Declan McAleer (Chairperson)
Ms Clare Bailey
Mrs Rosemary Barton
Mr John Blair
Mr Maurice Bradley
Mr Harry Harvey
Mr William Irwin

Witnesses:

Mr Alan McCulla	Anglo-North Irish Fish Producers' Organisation
Mr Harry Wick	Northern Ireland Fish Producers' Organisation

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): I welcome, via StarLeaf, from the Fishermen's Federation Mr Alan McCulla and Mr Harry Wick. Thank you for coming to the Committee meeting at very short notice. We consider quota apportionment to be an urgent issue, given the critical decisions to be made by the UK Government, most likely by the end of this month. If you take around 10 minutes to outline the federation's position on the matter, Committee members will then want to ask some questions. Alan or Harry, do either of you want to kick off?

Mr Alan McCulla (Anglo-North Irish Fish Producers' Organisation): Mr McAleer, I will start and Harry will continue. First of all, we thank you, the Committee members and staff for arranging today's emergency meeting at short notice. Your approach and that of the Committee is deeply appreciated.

In May 2020, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Michael Gove MP, presented to Parliament Command Paper 226, which deals with the UK's approach to the Northern Ireland protocol. Paragraph 52 of that paper deals with fisheries and includes the following sentence:

"The fishing industry is of great importance to Northern Ireland and we are determined to ensure that fishers from Northern Ireland are not placed at any disadvantage either through customs duties or associated barriers."

It is ironic that, today, the Northern Ireland fishing industry's greatest fear from the Brexit deal is not customs or associated barriers but that London will seek to redistribute within the UK some of what should be Northern Ireland's share of the additional fishing quotas that have been gained from the EU.

Across the UK, existing fishing quotas are distributed on the basis of a system that is known as fixed quota allocation (FQA) units. FQAs are a dynamic tool that have allowed Northern Ireland fishermen to invest in fishing opportunities all around the UK. Today, Northern Ireland's fishermen hold about 8.4% of all UK fishing opportunities, or FQAs. There seems to be a presumption that Northern Ireland's fishing operations are confined to the Irish Sea, a presumption that George Eustice, the EFRA Secretary, implied in recent answers to parliamentary questions. They are not. Only 20% of Northern Ireland's FQAs comprise fish and shellfish stocks in the Irish Sea. In other words, 80% of our fishing opportunities comprise quota holdings to the west of Scotland, in the North Sea and in the south-west approaches. We suspect that DEFRA's aim is to allocate only a proportion of the UK's gains in the Irish Sea to Northern Ireland's fishermen.

When Northern Ireland's existing share is applied to the additional quota that was gained by the UK from the EU, it should mean that Northern Ireland gains new fishing opportunities worth £19.1 million per annum from 2026 in all sea areas. Of those, 50% are prawns, which are the most important local catch here in Northern Ireland; 30% are pelagic species, such as mackerel and herring; and 20% are demersal and whitefish species. All local fishermen will benefit, and the local industry has an open mind about how that quota should be allocated and used in Northern Ireland.

DEFRA consulted in October 2020 on how any additional quota might be allocated across the UK. We provided the Committee with a copy of our response to that consultation. In short, all the alternative proposals from DEFRA would penalise Northern Ireland's fishermen. We believe that DEFRA is manoeuvring to reallocate quota from Northern Ireland to England, Scotland and, to a lesser extent, Wales in order to placate people with fishing interests there who are bitterly disappointed with the outcome of the fisheries elements of the UK-EU trade and cooperation agreement. The Minister is aware of those issues and has been supportive, raising them in discussions with Ministers in London, and, through our political representatives, we have made the First Minister and the deputy First Minister aware of the battle.

Our ask of the Committee today is that you add your support and consider what representations you can make to DEFRA and Ministers in order to ensure that Northern Ireland is allocated its share of the additional UK quota, based on the hard work and investments that have been made by Northern Ireland fishermen. Thank you.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): OK. Harry, do you want to pick up on something?

Mr Harry Wick (Northern Ireland Fish Producers' Organisation): Yes, please, Chair, if I may. Alan laid out the concern, and I will lay out why we feel that the risk is very credible. This is quite a complex issue when you consider all the narrative that surrounds it. To be absolutely clear, so that there can be no confusion on the issue, for us, this is about Northern Ireland getting its fair share of any additional quota that comes as a result of leaving the EU. It is not a conversation about what we will do with that quota once we have it. There are certainly discussions in Northern Ireland and other parts of the UK about how that quota could be applied more fairly within the areas of the devolved Administrations. We are very open to those discussions, but, for us, this is about the allocation of quota between the Administrations in Northern Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales. What happens when it gets to each of those Administrations is down to the Administration, but the decision on how much of it goes to each Administration is a central government decision.

The reason why we feel that there is a genuine threat is borne out by some of the questions that were asked recently in the House of Commons. On 14 January, Ian Paisley junior asked the Secretary of State for EFRA for no discrimination and whether Northern Ireland would be given its fair share. The response from Mr Eustice was that the consultation is about how the quota should be allocated in a new fashion. The consultation is not about whether the quota should be allocated in a new fashion, and I stress that point, but his response was that it is about how it should be allocated in a new fashion. That response suggests that, in his mind, a decision has already been made and that the consultation is moot. His response indicates that it should be allocated in a new fashion, and, as Alan pointed out, any of the proposed new allocation methods in the consultation would penalise Northern Ireland.

Stephen Farry also asked the Secretary of State whether the quota would be allocated by FQAs, and he avoided answering that part of Stephen's question. Carla Lockhart illustrated to him directly that it would be disadvantageous for Northern Irish vessels to have the quota allocated by any method other than FQAs and asked him to confirm that it would be allocated by FQAs. His response was that he was working closely with devolved:

"Administrations on a fairer sharing arrangement".

That implies that the current arrangement, which is allocation by FQAs, is not fair.

We have to be realistic about what we expect the Secretary of State to say about an issue that is under consultation, but from the language that he has used, it is perfectly clear that he thinks that there has to be a change. What also concerns me is the response that we get from his civil servants whenever we discuss the issue. We have a very positive working relationship with DEFRA civil servants, and they are normally very happy to tell us their thoughts on and plans for specific areas. On this issue, however, the answer that we are all getting is the party line. The indication that I am getting from my discussions with those civil servants is that there is a very strong chance that Northern Ireland will be disappointed in this, and disappointment equates to being disadvantaged.

The simplest way for me to express the situation is for you to visualise two fishermen, one from Northern Ireland and one from England. Both fish on vessels alongside each other in the North Sea for the same species. At the end of this process, the English fishing vessel could receive a greater uplift in fishing opportunity than the Northern Irish one purely by virtue of the fact that it is English. That is grossly unfair and, in my view, politically untenable.

Thanks for the opportunity to address the Committee.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): Thank you for that, Harry. Before I move on, I will say that I have been looking through the documents, and, without prejudicing what any other Committee member will say, I know that we will want to do whatever we can with you to get the best for the fishermen and fisherwomen here, regardless of how we ended up in our current position.

To elaborate a little further, you explained the quota issue in good detail. There were also issues in the documentation that I read through relating to the vessels that are from here effectively being treated as though they are from a third country. Concerns have also been raised that the £100 million modernisation fund, which the British Government are proposing, would not look at the type of investment that is needed in the industry. A Home Office skills issue has also been raised. I just seek clarity from you. I am sure that the Committee will make robust representation in support of the industry here. Could you update us on those other issues? Do you want us to make representation across that range of issues or just specifically on the quota issue, Harry or Alan?

Mr McCulla: I will come in first, Chair. It all starts at sea. As far as the fishing industry is concerned, it starts when the fishermen leave the ports of County Down and go around Northern Ireland to sea to catch fish. Everything else streams from that. That is not underplaying the other issues, and we would really appreciate the Committee's support to look again at designated ports, which is a live issue today.

You are quite right in your assertion about the £100 million investment in the fleet. The issue about crew is vital, too, but the reason that we are attaching so much significance to the quota today is that, as Harry said, we anticipate that a decision on it will be taken in London in the very near future, possibly within the next two weeks.

Clearly, the fishing industry from across the UK is making different representations on the matter. We are not asking for anything more than our fair share. Again, I repeat the numbers that I gave. Only 8.4% of the entire UK quota has been caught and is owned in Northern Ireland. On the basis of that number, we analysed the gains that the UK has made from the EU. We have a fair idea that we should be getting £19.1 million of quota every year based on 8.4%.

The thought of DEFRA or whoever coming in to raid Northern Ireland's share of the 8.4% so that they can placate fishermen from England, Scotland or Wales is, to put it bluntly, sickening. That is the level that we have got to: having displaced an EU system of discrimination against Northern Ireland fishermen, we are now going to replace it with a GB system that applies more discrimination. Clearly, that is what people think of Northern Ireland.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): Thank you for that, Alan.

Mr Irwin: Thank you for your presentation, Alan and Harry. From what I gather, there is a possibility that there will be an increase in the 8.4% catch allocation. Are you concerned that you may lose some

of your 8.4%, or is there likely to be an increase that you should get your fair share of? Which of those is the case, or is it both?

Mr Wick: It is an element of both. The 8.4% is a percentage of the UK's entire quota that is held in Northern Ireland now. The value of that 8.4% is due to increase by virtue of the fact that we receive extra fish as a result of leaving the European Union. I will talk about the amount that that 8.4% will increase by. Why it is technically both is that if the remaining 91.6% get an increase and the 8.4% do not, that would devalue that 8.4% to an extent. To say it in the most simple terms, what we are fighting for here is an increase in the value of that 8.4%, not an increase in the 8.4%.

Mr Irwin: Yes, I understand that now. There is an overall increase, and you still want it to remain at 8.4%; is that not right? If there is an overall increase, you would like it to remain —?

Mr McCulla: I am sorry, Mr Irwin. May I come in just to support what Harry said? The 8.4% is the historical amount that Northern Ireland fishermen have of the UK's quota. We are not asking for anything more than that. We are just asking for that share to be applied to each of the species that the UK has gained from the European Union. If you analyse each one of the species, you find that, in some, we have a greater share and, in others, we have a lesser share. We just want our existing shares to be applied to the quota that the UK has gained from the EU: nothing more. We are not asking to take some from England or any from Scotland or Wales; we just want our share.

As Harry said, when we get our share, we will wish to sit down with all the stakeholders here to explore how that might be allocated and managed for the greater good of Northern Ireland. That does not mean that we will not sit down with our colleagues across the UK, as we already do, to say, "What can we do to help fishermen in other regions?", but we need to secure Northern Ireland's share in the first instance. We are not looking to take anything away from England, Scotland or Wales. We just want our share based on what we hold today.

Mr Irwin: OK, I fully understand it now.

Mr M Bradley: Thank you very much, gentlemen, for your presentation. I had some difficulty getting in to the start of the meeting, Chair, but it seems to be all right now. I echo the Chairman's remarks. We, as a Committee, must do all that we can to support the industry in Northern Ireland and to have equality with all the other devolved Administrations. We cannot permit discrimination in any form, not least against the fishing fleet.

If I have picked it up right, the 8.4% is what the Northern Ireland fleet already holds. It is not asking for any more, and it does not want to accept anything less. Having had that fair share of the 8.4%, it in turn may divvy up the quotas with the other devolved Administrations. For instance, if there is a spare quota in mackerel, that may be offered to the Scottish or the Welsh fleet or whatever. Am I right in the way that I am picking this up?

Mr McCulla: Yes, Mr Bradley.

Mr M Bradley: All that you are asking for today is that we, as a Committee, discuss this with our Minister and do everything that we can to ensure that Northern Ireland fishermen are not disadvantaged in any way by whatever they are trying to plan [*Inaudible*] the mainland. If that is what you are asking, I am with you 100%, and I am sure that the rest of the Committee feels likewise.

Mr Wick: That is it in a nutshell, Mr Bradley.

Ms Bailey: Thanks to both of you for raising the matter with us today. Just to be sure, is the 8.4%, as it is currently allocated, our fair share, in your opinion?

Mr McCulla: Yes.

Ms Bailey: OK. Under the new UK Fisheries Bill, all UK fishermen, including those in Northern Ireland, of course, were guaranteed equal access, but that is now going to be compromised.

Mr McCulla: That is the danger. It goes back to the point that Harry made. You are quite right; the UK Fisheries Bill guarantees equal access for all UK licensed fishermen, including those from Northern Ireland, to waters all around the UK. It is a bit of an irony that, although we have a Bill that guarantees

access, DEFRA is now considering how it can make it unequal by awarding more fish to fishermen in certain regions and taking them away from fishermen in our region.

Ms Bailey: The Northern Ireland fishing sector was disproportionately and negatively affected by EU policy, and we are now facing disproportionate impacts as a result of the UK Government's internal policy. Despite a Fisheries Bill being passed that guarantees equal access, are they going to roll back on that already?

Mr McCulla: That is our fear, yes.

Ms Bailey: I am reading here that 80% of the fishing opportunities for Northern Ireland are "held beyond the Irish Sea". Where will they go? Will they be wholly in EU waters, or are they in other international areas as well?

Mr McCulla: They are in a mixture of waters, Ms Bailey. Those allocations are caught in the North Sea. They could be comprised of mackerel, herring or prawns. Some of it is landed outside Northern Ireland. We need to get the proper infrastructure in Northern Ireland so that we can bring home more of that catch. They are caught in all waters around the UK.

Ms Bailey: I fully understand why it was in your interest to campaign for Brexit and to leave the EU, because the whole sector was disproportionately impacted by the EU. Have there been discussions in the background from 2016 until now with the UK Government to make sure that they understood the context of the fishing sector here? Were any clear guarantees given to you, as the heads of your organisations, by DEFRA officials, that any of this would take place, or that you would be looked after properly?

Mr McCulla: DEFRA officials have been regular visitors to Northern Ireland, especially over the last two or three years. They consulted both Harry and me. There was discussion as to how this additional quota might be apportioned within the UK. It was certainly my understanding that the issue had been settled, until the consultation paper that we referred to appeared in October 2020. That came as a surprise to both Harry and me. We understood that the 8.4% would be the basis on which additional quota would be given to Northern Ireland. That was our clear understanding, but that was all upset by the DEFRA consultation paper.

Ms Bailey: Therefore, the UK Government are rolling back on clearly given assurances. On top of that, my concern is that there was no time for Committee scrutiny of the UK Fisheries Bill. That was clearly stated at the time, and I know that we are not working towards our own Northern Ireland Fisheries Bill.

In the long term — I know that it is not an immediate solution — do you see any benefit to having our own Fisheries Bill?

Mr Wick: There would definitely be benefit. Northern Ireland is very good at sorting out its own issues when it comes to fishing. That is certainly the case compared to England and Scotland. Having that ability enshrined in law would give us the protections that we need from other, potentially damaging, circumstances from outside Northern Ireland. It is something that Alan and I would welcome very much.

Ms Bailey: For the record, you have been left in a shocking position. You rightly raise your concerns now, at the twelfth hour. We have made no move to enshrine a Fisheries Bill in law, and now we have a rollback by the UK Government, after everything that you have been through already. It is absolutely appalling.

Mr Blair: I thank Alan and Harry for presenting to us and for keeping us updated on recent events. Most of what I was going to raise has already been covered. However, I want to reiterate the support expressed by other members for the associations represented. As a Committee, we are well aware of the potential to decimate our coastal areas, where fishing is a major economic hub.

I was going to ask this question, which I think has already been answered. You have been dealing with this since October, consultation time, and prior to that, I assume. You wrote to us on 13 January, and you have dealt with the Committee since then, setting up the meeting and giving us information. I

take it that, in summary, nothing has changed in recent days to offer you any reassurance. I gather that the matter is still for clarification between the EFRA Secretary of State and our AERA Minister?

Mr McCulla: That is right, Mr Blair. Earlier, Harry referred to the series of questions addressed by Northern Ireland MPs to the EFRA Secretary of State last week. They are all very good questions. Unfortunately, the answers were empty. My understanding is that, yesterday afternoon, Minister Poots had a meeting with his opposite number in London, Minister Victoria Prentis. This issue was raised again on two occasions and, unfortunately, Mrs Prentis was again unable to give any guarantees or commitments or anything else. All that does is continue to raise suspicions that somebody in London is trying to cook the books and steal quota off Northern Ireland fishermen.

Mr Wick: Today, the largest fishermen's organisation in England, the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations, has come out in support of a system that uses any extra quota from Brexit to benefit its own members in select parts of England, so we could see Northern Ireland's quota being exchanged with international partners to benefit those in the south of England and the North Sea. The fact that our sister organisations on the other side of the water are campaigning for Northern Irish quota to be taken and exchanged is an issue of grave and immediate concern.

Mr Blair: Are you satisfied that the economic importance of fishing to our coastal towns is being represented by Northern Ireland structures in negotiations with DEFRA? I am thinking of places such as Kilkeel and Portavogie, where fisheries are a major part of the local economy and much more than that; socially as well.

Mr McCulla: Our priority, Mr Blair, was to see what sort of a deal was struck between the UK and the EU. Like fishermen across the UK overall, we are disappointed by the deal. I have thought long and hard as to why I am disappointed. To be honest, the reason that I am disappointed is that expectations were raised so high by the Prime Minister and all those below him. Clearly, when it came to 24 December, they could not meet those expectations, so we are disappointed at that level. Nevertheless, we have to recognise that, if what we are asking for today is delivered, and Northern Ireland gets its fair share of the additional quota, by 2026, based on 2020 values, we would get an additional £19.1 million per year. That would be big to coastal communities in Northern Ireland. In UK fisheries terms, it is tiny.

Mr Blair: It is small. That is why, Alan, I used the word "proportionately". In a nutshell, it boils down to the fact that our economic need is as great and real as anyone else's in this regard.

Mr McCulla: Absolutely; you have got it. The economic need of Northern Ireland plc and of the fishing communities around the coast of Northern Ireland is not the same as the economic need in the south of England.

Mr Blair: Thank you.

Mr Harvey: We need to secure Northern Ireland's share of the additional fishing opportunities. Northern Ireland cannot be diminished at all. Our quota needs to be a long way better than the Hague preference. If we have the quota, we have to be able to catch and market it, but we can do that. We need to improve infrastructure, but we will. We know that we need to enlarge our fleets and have many more fishermen and men and women on land. The fact that we will be able to sell tariff-free means, at least, that we know that we have a market. We need to be able to get them. I would fight for even more than the 8.4%. While 8.4% is good and keeps us the same, we were led to believe by the UK Government that we would be better off, but now we are really wondering whether that is the case. We need to make sure that we are better off. We will play our part here; I know that.

Mr Wick: Thank you very much, Mr Harvey. As Alan has pointed out, our coastal communities could be £19.1 million better off. Your assistance in securing that and stopping other UK interests slashing that figure would greatly be appreciated.

Mr McCulla: Mr Harvey, hopefully, the whole world, Northern Ireland included, will, this year, start to recover from the global pandemic that we have all been suffering. The fishing industry is not coming to the Committee today asking for a handout. All we are asking for is a share of the new quota so that we can contribute, in our way, to rebuilding Northern Ireland's economy, nothing more.

Mr Harvey: We want to help you do that.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): OK.

Mr Harvey: Thank you, Chair.

Mrs Barton: Thank you, Alan and Harry for your comments today. It has been interesting listening to you, coming, as I do, from the lakes of Fermanagh. I welcome the comments of the Chair and other members in support of your getting your fair share of what you are entitled to.

Most of the questions that I was thinking of have been asked. I may be asking you to look into a crystal ball, but if you are given a smaller share of the quota, how much could the £19 million be cut by? Are you talking about 50% or £1 million less?

Mr McCulla: We honestly do not know, Mrs Barton. It is a good question. This is the unknown territory that we are working in. Think of it this way: the fishing year runs from 1 January to 31 December when we have boats at sea, weather permitting. As we sit here today, we do not know what fishing opportunities we have for the rest of the year. You used the term "crystal ball", but my crystal ball has not been working too well for the last 29 years in this job. We could speculate as to what we might lose and what would be the minimum or the maximum, but forgive me if I do not want to get into that field.

Mr Harvey mentioned the 8.4%, but, ideally, we could look for more. We are not greedy people. All we are asking George Eustice for is a share based on historic catches and the investment that Northern Ireland fishermen have made over the past few years. Nothing more and nothing less.

Mrs Barton: OK, thanks.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): Ms Bailey, you were looking to come back in again.

Ms Bailey: Thanks. You sound delighted, Chair. *[Laughter.]* I want to come back to the Fisheries Act, as I am unsure about its provisions because of the lack of scrutiny time for it. You said that it guarantees equal access to all UK fishermen. Does it say access but not quotas? Is there anything in the Fisheries Act that sets out a guarantee of quotas or access to getting on with your business, or is it just access? Are we looking at access in that you will be able to sail freely in those waters but not catch in them?

Mr Wick: Access in the Fisheries Act is along the lines that no Administration can exclude vessels from another Administration from fishing in its waters. However, the principle runs much deeper. We could see some UK Administrations trying to work round that in discriminatory ways. For example, the Administration in the Isle of Man is making it technically more difficult for non-Isle of Man vessels to fish in its waters. That is one form of breaching the principle of equal access.

Giving a fisher in one area an uplift of quota based on their nationality but not another is a form of discrimination to equal access. It is unfortunate that the Fisheries Act determines equal access in such a simplistic way by non-discrimination between devolved authorities based on access to waters, when the principle and moral tenet of equal access goes much further, but the Fisheries Bill does not stretch quite that far.

Ms Bailey: OK. Is there any concern that restricting, removing or reducing your quota contravenes the Fisheries Act?

Mr Wick: The argument that DEFRA and the United Kingdom Government make is that they are not taking anything away because it has not been given to us yet. We have a reasonable expectation of getting additional quota. The risk is that the UK Government will take that reasonable expectation away and give it to someone else.

Mr McCulla: Take the example of our backyard: the Irish Sea. Effectively, the UK Fisheries Act says that a fisherman from Northern Ireland has the same access to the Irish Sea as a fisherman from England: both have the same access. However, what is being considered in London today is that, while they both have the same access, the fisherman from England will be given more quota than the fisherman from Northern Ireland; in other words, "We'll increase his fishing opportunities at the expense of those from Northern Ireland".

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): How long has the 8.4% quota been in place for? How was it calculated to begin with?

Mr McCulla: The FQA units were established in the late 1990s. They reflected historical fishing [*Inaudible*] reference period through the middle of the 1990s. The core FQAs were established back in the 1990s, but, since then, fishermen throughout the UK have traded in quota; they have bought and sold FQAs as fishing patterns have changed and evolved. Every few years, there has been an opportunity to update the FQA register to reflect that trade. My argument is that, in the absence of an updated register in the past year or two, the FQA register pretty much reflects fishing activity right up to recent years. It should not be seen in a historical context.

Mr Irwin: I have not heard a member who is not behind you in this situation. In essence, you are saying that, if Northern Ireland gets its fair share of any increased quota, that will be a plus for Northern Ireland and will mean that Northern Ireland is treated fairly. Is that right?

Mr McCulla: Yes. Harry and I get it; we have been with the Committee over the past four and a half years in the lead-up to Brexit. The fishing industry in Northern Ireland was probably in a unique position: it was one of the few industries that supported Brexit. We could see the opportunities that will continue to come from it. Let us be clear about that: we will win. What we are saying today is that we want to win our fair share.

We want to contribute to the economy of Northern Ireland. People have said to Harry and me that fishing is only a tiny part of the economy. They are quite right; it is a tiny part of the economy. One reason that it is a tiny part of the economy is that, for over 40 years, it was beaten down by the EU system. [*Inaudible*] every day for the fisherpeople out through the door of the office that I am sitting in, who have endured years of pressure and so much from the European Union but have survived to today. Having got through to 2021, there is an offering on the table that will help to rebuild the industry and contribute to the economy of Northern Ireland. All we are asking for is to be given the chance to contribute to Northern Ireland — nothing more.

At the beginning of today's meeting, the Chair mentioned designated ports, which have been in the media over the past week and a half. That is a live issue today; that is where the Northern Ireland protocol kicks in. As we sit here, it is a moving goalpost. Yesterday was a good news day; we welcome the step in the right direction from the Irish authorities that they are to designate more ports to help fishermen in Northern Ireland.

However, having made one step forward yesterday, we almost feel today that we have taken two steps back. Some of the regulations in the protocol are, simply, daft when it comes to the fishing industry. We are being told by the Irish authorities, for example, that a fishing boat from Kilkeel, Ardglass, Portavogie or Derry can land in to a small number of ports on certain days of the week at certain times, depending on their size; even then, they have to comply with international regulations. The same fishing boat can take its product in Kilkeel, take it to Lisahally, put it on the back of a lorry and, according to the Northern Ireland protocol, drive it back and forward all day long over the border, unfettered. There is a lot of work still to be done. The fishing industry will benefit; we will recover, but much needs to be fine-tuned.

Mrs Barton: You wrote to the Chairman on 13 January and said that we:

"should benefit from an additional £19 million".

You say "should". You have never heard from government or any official source that it will be approximately £19 million.

Mr McCulla: You are right, Mrs Barton, to pick up on that. We used "should" deliberately. When we did the analysis of the additional quota that the UK got from the EU, we applied the 8.4%. The figure of £19.1 million is what we should get. Our fear, which we are expressing today, is that we will not get it because it will be rated, stripped and stolen by DEFRA.

Mrs Barton: Thank you for that clarification.

Mr Harvey: The first thing that we need to find out is what they are hiding from us. We need to be hitting them from all directions and get in the door before they come out with a result, because, at the

minute, if they are hiding it from us, we can still change it. I will do all in my power. I will speak to our MPs, lobby and do whatever I can. We should all be shouting from the rooftops and saying that we want more, that anything less is not acceptable, and that they should get on with it. Thanks, Chair.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): Harry and Alan, do you want to add anything before we adjourn?

Mr Wick: I want to touch on the £100 million promised to the industry by the Prime Minister. In the speech announcing that money, he said that it was specifically for modernisation. You do not have to look very hard at the fishing vessels in Northern Ireland harbours to find vessels that may be 50 years old. No other part of the UK has a greater need than Northern Ireland for a modernisation of its fishing fleet, although the Clyde may come into the conversation.

I will put £100 million into perspective. It is enough to replace the oldest 2% of over-10-metre trawlers in the UK. Therefore there is not a lot of money to go round the whole of the industry in the UK, and the fish-processing sector. That is why it is vital that Northern Ireland fight for this money on the basis of need rather than on the basis of the Barnett formula or any other basis that would see the richer parts of the industry in the UK try to Hoover up the money for themselves. Your support in representing Northern Ireland's cause for a fair share of the additional £100 million, allocated according to need and not greed, would be welcome.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): Thank you, Harry and Alan. Does the Committee agree that we write a letter of support for the fishing industry, based on the conversation that we have had today, and that we do that as a top priority?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): Thank you very much, Alan and Harry, for coming here at short notice. You have heard the Committee give its unanimous agreement to making that representation. We will probably see you at some stage in the future.

Mr McCulla: We look forward to it. I will close as I started. We appreciate your support, and that of all members, and we appreciate the approach of the staff. We approached you at very short notice, last week, and you pulled this together today. It is very much appreciated and recognised.

The Chairperson (Mr McAleer): We recognised the urgency. Thank you, and take care.