

FAROESE TAKE ON HERRING

With Atlanto-Scandian herring increasingly abundant in Faroese waters, the Faroese—blocked from renegotiating their catch share—set their own quota for very good reason, according to Minister of Fisheries Jacob Vestergaard.

IN THE WAKE of this year's international negotiations on the joint management of the Atlanto-Scandian herring fishery in the Northeast Atlantic, the Faroe Islands decided to set their own catch quota in line with what they consider their rightful share of the recommended total allowable catch (TAC). Fixing it at 17 percent of the advised TAC of 619,000 tonnes, the Faroese—ready to fish just about 105,000 tonnes—thereby allotted themselves a significant rise compared to, in their view, an outrageously low 5-percent share.

Predictably, Norway and the European Union were quick to condemn the unilateral move of the Faroese while calling for sanctions against the Faroe Islanders, whom the Scottish fisheries minister accused of “jeopardizing the future of vital fishing stocks.”

So what's next—do the Faroese fear the specter of sanctions, and why this sudden increase of their share? We

asked the Minister of Fisheries of the Faroe Islands, Jacob Vestergaard, and his answers may certainly help explain the situation from a Faroese point of view.

Earlier, the Faroese had outlined their position in a statement issued by Mr. Vestergaard, stressing the point that their share of the catch quota had been too low for too long, as the Atlanto-Scandian herring is found increasingly in Faroese waters.

“In particular,” the minister said, “given the obvious changes in the distribution of the herring stock in recent years, and the fact that the relative shares between the coastal states have never been satisfactory, the Faroe Islands can no longer accept a sharing arrangement that allocates the Faroe Islands a mere 5 percent of the total allowable catch.”

HANDLING THE PRESSURE: He added: “During the last decade, there have been major changes in the distribution

of herring in the Northeast Atlantic. The distribution of herring has shifted in a southwesterly direction, leading to an increased proportion of herring feeding in Faroese waters during the summer. Herring has also been observed to feed in Faroese waters for a longer period than previously.

“Prolonged fishery in the Faroese zone has been reported for several years, and these last years, herring has been fished in Faroese waters from May to late November. The abundance of herring in Faroese waters has made fishing for other pelagic species increasingly difficult due to unavoidable by-catches of herring.

“Survey and fishery data clearly indicate that the summer distribution and duration of herring abundance in Faroese waters is higher than seen in neighboring waters. However, the 5-per-



Jacob Vestergaard, Minister of Fisheries; pelagic fishing vessels pair trawling (opposite).

cent Faroese share of the herring stock is significantly smaller than that of any other coastal state.

“The desire of the Faroe Islands to renegotiate the allocation of this stock has been made clear to the other parties at negotiations in October 2011 and was most recently reiterated at the coastal states negotiations in October and December 2012 and again in London on 23 January 2013. The Faroe Islands therefore deeply regret that the other coastal states have not been willing to consider the Faroese position, but rather have chosen to exclude the Faroe Islands from an arrangement for 2013.”

HARDBALL: When we asked Mr. Vestergaard whether the Faroese are now to expect sanctions from Norway or the

EU, he maintained his firm stance. “Sanctions or not,” he said, “we find it peculiar that just because we happen to have differing views on the joint management of a fish species, some people seem so eager to discuss coercion and sanctions.

“It used to be different—you could have differences in such issues without generally affecting bilateral trade relations. We may hardly ever share the same views on everything, nor should we necessarily do so. This is about economic interests and negotiation, as the Norwegians would know. They themselves left the joint arrangement not long ago, demanding an increase in their share from 57 to 70 percent of the TAC.”

Meanwhile Atlanto-Scandian herring, unlike North Atlantic mackerel,

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The Minister of Fisheries is responsible for fisheries and maritime affairs, including marine resource management, marine research, fisheries inspection, marine safety and rescue.

The Minister is also responsible for agriculture and emergency services.

Policies and regulations are coordinated and implemented by the Ministry of Fisheries and its associated agencies.

Permanent Secretary: Rógvi Reinert

General Secretary: Katrina Michelsen

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Agencies:

- Faroe Marine Research Institute (Havstovan)
- Faroe Islands Fisheries Inspection (Fiskiveiðieftirlitið)
- Maritime Rescue and Coordination Center (MRCC)
- Faroese Emergency Management and Inspection Agency (Tilbúgvingarstovnur)
- Agriculture Agency (Búnaðarstovan)
- Equal Pay Office (Trygdargrunnur Fiskivinnunnar)

has traditionally not been of high economic importance for the EU.

“The EU would have more interest in the mackerel fishery,” Mr. Vestergaard noted.

“For the Norwegians, both mackerel and herring are important. Suppose the EU and Norway work together to pressure the Faroe Islands to change position. Regardless, we are not willing to accept the unfair sharing arrangement of earlier times. We are fully able to fish the amounts that we have responsibly decided to allocate to our fleets in our own home waters; and we can process the catch and bring it to market, too.”

