

MINISTER HØGNI HOYDAL ON COMING FISHERIES REFORM

Ministry of Fisheries

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Minister of Fisheries:
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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

Department of Fisheries
Director:
Andras Kristiansen

Agencies:

- Faroe Marine Research Institute (Havstovan)
- Vørn — 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)

Long awaited reform of the Faroe Islands fisheries legislation at last gets underway with a commission launched to advise on key issues such as future fishing rights and securing a level playing field for industry participants.

AFTER YEARS of debates on the necessity of reforming the Faroese fisheries legislation, signs are the process is finally gaining momentum under the new government that took office in September 2015 following general elections. Headed by Prime Minister Aksel V. Johannesen, and with Høgni Hoydal in the cabinet as Minister



Faroese fishermen working on the deck of a pelagic vessel; Minister of Fisheries Høgni Hoydal (opposite).

of Fisheries, the center-leftist coalition of Social Democrats and Republicans quickly announced its intention to deal decisively with the question of fisheries policy reform, launching a committee to look into major aspects of concern and report back to the Minister of Fisheries by 1st August.

The background of the process is multifaceted with pressures ranging from voter sentiment to the practicalities of time—as by a unanimous decision of 2007 by the Faroese Parliament, all existing fishing rights are set to end on 31st December 2017, which today, as it were, is holding the catch sector hostage to a growing sense of uncertainty. Now by taking on the challenge of addressing the issue in its entirety, Mr. Hoydal is putting himself on the spot.

“We established a Commission in January this year [2016] with a remit to make a proposal on how to reform the fisheries policy in the Faroe Islands,” the Minister noted. “The Commission has been tasked

with evaluating and revising how the fishing industry is structured as a whole, which includes the Law on Commercial Fishing and other relevant legislation.”

“The aim,” Mr. Hoydal said, “is to organize the entire Faroese fishing industry within a secure and durable legal framework, administration and systems; to ensure that living resources in Faroese territorial waters and Faroese rights in international waters, as well as rights which the Faroe Islands hold through agreements with other countries, are the property of the Faroese people and remain a lasting foundation of the Faroese economy and the welfare of the Faroese nation.”

The ‘property of the people’ has been one of the sticking points with interpretations varying, depending largely on one’s position within, or in relation to, the rather diverse fishing industry. A complicating factor is seen in the fact

that while parts of the industry have flourished in recent years, other parts have had a hard time barely surviving. Thus, to quite an extent, the call for reform has its basis in the perception that fishing rights should be distributed more equitably.

‘A PIONEERING COUNTRY’

So in Mr. Hoydal’s view, the idea of a level playing field is central to the topic—and that, indeed, market forces should be the deciding factor for the awarding of fishing rights, in contrast to the traditional ‘grandfathering’ principle currently in force.

“It is my intent that we make it possible to work in a market-based fishing industry with industrial freedom and level competitive conditions,” he said. “This means that we can avoid business opportunities only being accessible to a few and that we can ensure that people

enjoy equal rights to conduct business and to ensure a basis for varied business activity, innovation and development throughout the country.”

While such a proposition has been largely contested by leaders of the industry, Mr. Hoydal was upbeat about the prospects of building consensus.

“We’re only at the beginning of this process,” he said. “There are different aspects to many of the issues that will have to be deliberated upon, and that is also part of the Commission’s terms of reference. We look forward to receiving its report and will proceed based on its findings and anything else of relevance deemed necessary and expedient. Eventually, we need to arrive at something that will last beyond an election cycle.”

In an international context, the Fisheries Minister is looking to position the Faroe Islands firmly in the forefront of managing fisheries sustainably, capitalizing on the remarkable amount of research data already available on the country’s marine ecosystems.

“It is my hope that the Faroe Islands will become a pioneering country in terms of sustainable management of all fish stocks—in Faroese territorial waters, as well as in terms of international cooperation—and to have the most advanced knowledge and research about the fish stocks and eco-systems in the ocean.”

Mr. Hoydal added: “It is certainly important that we as a country continuously develop our role and responsibility with regards to international cooperation, as well as agreements on fishing and the fishing industry, and that we secure our equitable share of rights to shared and migratory fish stocks.”