# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **TITLE** | **Agreement of 2020 EU Fishing Opportunities and Quotas under the Common Fisheries Policy** |
| **DATE** | **18/12/2019** |
| **BY** | **Lesley Griffiths – Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs** |

I have just returned from leading the Wales delegation at the EU Agriculture and Fisheries Council in Brussels. The Council concluded in the early hours of this morning and, working with delegation colleagues from across the UK, I am pleased to inform members we were successful in securing a positive deal for Wales on fishing opportunities and quotas.

In line with our commitments to ensure our natural resources are sustainably managed and based on the best available scientific advice, my priority was to safeguard fish stocks whilst securing a positive outcome for those coastal communities whose economies depend so much on the sea. This year’s negotiations were complex due to the impact of Brexit and the challenges of some stocks.

We worked closely with our stakeholders and I am very grateful to them for their support, in particular to Jim Evans of the Welsh Fishermen’s Association and WMFAG members, for providing advice and support throughout.

Our number one priority during negotiation was Seabass, aiming to secure a sustainable but fair deal for both commercial and recreational fishers whilst ensuring this important stock continues its track to recovery.

We were able to present a strong case to the Presidency and Commission on Seabass and achieve the following:

* Recreational anglers will see an increase in the quantity of Seabass they can keep, from 1 to 2 fish per day. The length of the season has also increased from 7 months to 9 months. Catch and release must be practiced for the remainder of the year;
* Annual allowances for commercial hook and line vessels has increased from 5.5 to 5.7 tonnes per year;
* By-catch allowance for fixed nets remains at 1.4 tonnes per year;
* The requirement to reduce some of the discarded by-catch of Seabass in the trawl and seine fisheries has been addressed by allowing more Seabass to be landed. Quantities for seine have been increased from 210kg to 520kg per two months and for trawls from 400kg to 520kg per two months. Both have increased the percentage of the weight of the total catch from 1% per day to 5% per trip;
* A minimum conservation reference size for recreational fishers taking Seabass has been established matching that for the commercial sector at 42 cm.

These combined measures ensure Seabass is still protected and fished at a level below Maximum Sustainable Yield.

In terms of other stocks relevant to Wales we have secured an increased or maintained quotas for Skates/Rays, Anglerfish, Plaice, Haddock and Megrim in the Celtic Sea and for Plaice, Sole and Herring in the Irish Sea, while still meeting sustainability targets.

In the Celtic Sea, the Cod stock remains challenging. The Council has set a TAC of 805t alongside a package of significant technical measures. Whilst this is challenging for some, the vast majority of the Welsh fleet will be able to continue to sustainably fish in the Celtic Sea.

*This statement is being issued during recess in order to keep members informed. Should*

*Members wish me to make a further statement or to answer questions on this when the Assembly returns I would be happy to do so.*