



Victoria Prentis MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Farming, Fisheries and Food
Defra
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Dear Minister,

Re: Setting of catch limits

We are writing to request a meeting with you to discuss the development of the UK's positions for this year's negotiations on catch limits for stocks shared with the EU. We were pleased that the UK and the EU succeeded in reaching an agreement for fishing opportunities for 2021 last month. However, we are concerned that, despite assurances from ministers and a specific commitment in the 'Leaders' Pledge for Nature' to end overfishing, the Government agreed, and in some cases advocated for setting catch limits exceeding the independent scientific advice.

We recognise the many challenges of this first post-Brexit year in which the UK joined fisheries negotiations as an independent party outside the EU. Nevertheless, the failure of both parties to reach a sustainable agreement on fishing limits in line with the Trade and Cooperation Agreement and domestic legislation on both sides sets a very worrying precedent. We seek assurance that this remains an exception and that the UK will deliver its various sustainability commitments in the years ahead.

Throughout the passage of the Fisheries Act, Ministers consistently claimed that the Government would deliver a world leading, gold standard approach to sustainable fisheries management. Our organisations raised concerns that the Act gave leeway for ministers to take short term, politically expedient decisions, which allowed for continued overfishing. We regret to see these predictions come true quite so early.

Where recovery of depleted stocks is needed and should be prioritised, the catch limits have been set to favour short term economic interests at the expense of long-term sustainability. This represents a disappointing continuation of past inaction and a missed opportunity to demonstrate the UK's leadership towards sustainable fisheries management. The UK Fisheries Act specifically mentions the need to recover depleted stocks above levels capable of producing the maximum sustainable yield **and** to ensure a precautionary approach to fisheries management is taken. It is therefore difficult to understand why both these objectives have been ignored and what the UK's stock recovery plans are.

The UK is a signatory to a number of international sustainability targets and goals, and the joint communique published at this year's meeting of G7 environment ministers emphasises the importance of meeting the UN Sustainable Development Goals. We are concerned that the government's ambitious rhetoric and attempt to position itself as a world leader on environmental issues is being undermined by the failure to address overfishing.

ClientEarth 

**MARINE
CONSERVATION
SOCIETY** 

OCEANA 



We would welcome an opportunity to meet with you and assist you in developing the UK's position on fisheries negotiations for this coming year, to avoid a repetition of these shortcomings and deliver on the UK's sustainability ambitions.

Yours sincerely,

Pascale Moehrle, Executive Director, Oceana in Europe

Adam Weiss, Head of Programme: Ocean, Plastics & Chemicals, Client Earth

Jonny Hughes, Senior Policy Manager, Blue Marine Foundation