



BLUE MARINE
FOUNDATION

The Rt Hon. Victoria Prentis MP
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Dear Minister,

Outcome of last year's fisheries negotiations

We are writing to you following the publication of the '*Assessing the sustainability of fisheries catch limits negotiated by the UK for 2020 to 2022*' report by CEFAS. We would like to commend the government on the production of this report as a transparent assessment of the sustainability of TAC setting. We have long argued that the government (and the European Commission) should clearly, honestly and in a scientifically robust way assess the performance of the TAC setting process against the ICES advice, so are pleased to see that this has finally happened.

Whilst we are pleased to see this report has been published, we are deeply disappointed, but not surprised, by the poor outcomes of TAC-setting in relation to sustainability. The report echoes the assessments that we have been making for several years, including the annual TAC analyses provided by the Pew Trusts, ClientEarth and Oceana's UK Fisheries Audit. In the fisheries negotiations only 35% of 2022 TACs relevant to the UK were set in line with scientific advice, with close to a shocking two thirds set above scientific advice. This is far short of the ambition stated in the Fisheries White Paper and contravenes the requirements of the Fisheries Act and the UK's commitments under international agreements. It also fails to meet section 4d of the 'Leader's Pledge for Nature' which explicitly commits to eliminating unsustainable fishing practices. To see almost two thirds of TACs set above scientific advice makes many of these commitments ring hollow.

We appreciate that setting TACs for shared stocks is an international negotiation with other parties – most commonly the EU but also Norway and the contracting parties to the Coastal States negotiations. Therefore, overfishing is sometimes driven by other parties. However, many of these stocks are overfished at the behest of the UK. We find this very concerning, particularly considering the extremely limited progress being made to end overfishing. We request transparency as to which TACs the UK advocated should be set above advice and a further commitment to follow scientific advice in the future.

We understand that the condition of some fish stocks (notably the stocks with zero or very low catch advice) require difficult decisions to be made. However, as the collapse of these stocks is a direct result of deliberate, or at least conscious, decisions to overfish them, their collapse was both predictable and inevitable. We are, therefore, extremely concerned to see such limited (if any)

progress being made for these stocks. Furthermore, in light of what we understand to be difficult decisions, we were keen to demonstrate a significant flexibility in our advocacy approach in 2021 and made suggestions that we felt would make a reasonable first step towards recovering these depleted stocks. Unfortunately, despite this, the TACs for several heavily depleted stocks were simply rolled over from the previous year, showing no ambition to improve the situation. In most instances this was done directly at the request of the UK, which is particularly troubling and brings into question the value for us in engaging in detailed policy discussions when decisions are then made that, in our view, contravene the government's policy, ignore the ICES advice and do not meet the UK's international commitments.

We would be grateful if you could meet with us to discuss the points we have raised.

Your sincerely,



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Executive Director,
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Jonny Hughes
Senior Policy Manager,
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Kyle Lischak
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