

Údarás na Gaeltachta welcomes the opportunity to participate in this consultation on the reform of the EU Common Fisheries Policy.

Údarás na Gaeltachta

Údarás na Gaeltachta is the regional development agency with responsibility for the economic, social and cultural development of the Gaeltacht.

The statutory brief of Údarás na Gaeltachta is the preservation and maintenance of the Irish language as the principal community language in the Gaeltacht through the sustainable development of the Gaeltacht economy. In furtherance of these aims, An tÚdarás promotes the development of skills and entrepreneurial abilities, the attraction of mobile investment to the Gaeltacht and productive schemes of employment through the development of local natural resources (including coastal resources).

The Board of An tÚdarás is comprised of 20 members, 17 of whom are directly elected by the Gaeltacht electorate and three others, including the Chairman who are nominated by the Minister.

An tÚdarás has as strong track record in promoting the sustainable exploitation of coastal resources, with a particular emphasis on aquaculture, extending back as far as the 1970s. Údarás na Gaeltachta currently supports coastal communities through a range of incentives which are primarily directed at sectors such as seafood processing and aquaculture.

The Gaeltacht Coast

The Gaeltacht coastline extends for approximately 2,500 km, which equates to almost 25% of the length of the coastline of Ireland including all of the offshore islands. There are nine inhabited Gaeltacht offshore islands. The communities have historically depended greatly on the sea and have developed specialisations in fishing, aquaculture and seafood marketing

Two of the six designated National Fishery Harbours are located in the Gaeltacht: Ros a' Mhíl and An Daingean. Larger whitefish vessels used to also operate from Gaeltacht ports such as Ailt an Chorráin and Baile Glas. However, the overall decline of the fishing industry and the 2006 national ban on commercial driftnet fishing for salmon has had repercussions for the Gaeltacht; declining trend in fisheries participation correspond with the national picture.

There are 16 fishery cooperatives around the Gaeltacht coast providing important organisational groupings of local fishermen.

National Competitiveness

Several Gaeltacht companies are currently exporting their products worldwide. Among the products being exported are: Smoked Fish, Readymade Meals, Canned Products, Fillets and other high value-added products.

Although there is a global recession the food sector including seafood, continues to grow. The seafood sector should be supported through suitable incentives and schemes so that companies can continue to invest in Research, Development and Innovation to enable them to

develop new products and processes. With suitable supports this sector in the Gaeltacht could be a World leader.

Socially Excluded and Vulnerable Groups

Traditionally, fishing has been a driver of the local economy in Gaeltacht coastal communities. Not only are these communities greatly dependant on fishing but also on related industries such as fish farming, fish processing, aquaculture and seafood processing. It is extremely important that these vulnerable, marginal communities are supported through the provision of suitable schemes and incentives which will help to create employment opportunities thus ensuring the continued viability of Gaeltacht coastal communities.

It is imperative that the employment provided in fishing, processing and related services at Gaeltacht ports is protected and developed further. The fisheries policy must provide some flexibility so that small fishermen can continue to fish and that these vulnerable communities are protected so that they may continue as vibrant communities long into the future.

Training for new skills and the creation of alternative options for fishermen wishing to leave the industry are also needed.

Conclusion

Fishing, aquaculture, seafood and related sectors are important drivers of the Gaeltacht economy. In order to develop these sectors there needs to be a flexible policy which can ensure the future of these sectors in the Gaeltacht.

Small fishermen need to be allowed to continue to fish, perhaps allowing them exclusive rights closer to shore.

Small fishing ports need to be developed.

Gaeltacht islands need to be supported.

Gaeltacht coastal communities need to be supported through suitable incentives which will help to create employment opportunities thus ensuring the continued viability of these vulnerable, marginal communities.

Entrepreneurs who wish to develop companies operating in a way that is sustainable and not damaging to the environment should be supported.

Entrepreneurs who wish to develop innovative species such as abalone, algae etc. should be supported.