

A 'hard Brexit' could reduce European fleet by 15%

The European Fisheries Alliance (EUFA) estimates that a 'hard Brexit' scenario could lead to the loss of 6,100 jobs in the European fisheries sector and a 15 per cent reduction of the fleet (500-600 vessels).

This was stated yesterday during the panel discussion "Safeguarding access to the waters of the United Kingdom: What does Brexit mean for the European Union's fleet and employment?", held in the European Parliament.

EUFA is an alliance of national fisheries organizations from nine countries affected by Brexit, of which Spain is part through the Spanish Confederation of Fisheries (CEPESCA).

The roundtable was led by MEP Alain Cadec, chairman of the European Parliament's Committee on Fisheries, who assured that the EU could grant the United Kingdom free access to the Community market for its fishery products if European vessels had access to British waters.

EUFA represents the most affected fleets and coastal communities, especially under a tough Brexit scenario where the UK would deny access to its waters and the EU market access conditions would be more restrictive. The discussion panel discussed a number of key issues, such as ways to reach a mutually beneficial agreement for both the EU and the UK fisheries sector or the interdependence of fish trade between the EU and the United Kingdom.

EUFA members have urged EU negotiators to place fisheries among the priority issues of the Council's mandate to the European Commission.

In addition, as the discussion panel expressed it, it is essential for the EU and the UK to define a long-term post-Brexit agreement that will benefit both European and British industry and ensure the sustainability of fish stocks.

The discussion panel, the links existing between the United Kingdom and the EU as to fisheries and how sharing limited resources, fishing areas and markets have historically defined the relationship between the two. In fact, one-third of the EUFA catches come from British waters and two-thirds of UK fish exports are destined for the European market.

"Any exit agreement will have far-reaching consequences, both economic and social ones, for our fishermen and fishing communities," said Gerard van Balsfoort, spokesperson for the European fishing industry. "Our initial analysis shows that, in the case of a 'hard Brexit' scenario, could lose up to 6,100 jobs in the European fisheries sector. "

"For this reason," he continued, "we consider it essential to include fisheries in the negotiating mandate of the Council to the European Commission. We have already offered our support to the EU negotiators to ensure that our concerns are well understood and, in particular, that any exit agreement guarantees mutual access to

traditional fishing areas, preserves the current distribution of TACs and quotas and sets a responsible long-term management framework."

For their part, CEPESCA representatives explained that "for the Spanish fishing sector, especially for the fleet of Gran Sol, part of the coast and fishing with permits in the Falkland Islands, access to the waters of the United Kingdom is fundamental. Therefore, with their participation in the EUFA, they will defend the interests of Spanish fishermen in the Brexit negotiation.

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