

European seafood processors push for fresh tariff quotas as buying season looms

Coronavirus has highlighted even more the EU processing sector's reliance on seafood imports in a crisis.

The EU seafood processing industry is calling for the new Autonomous Tariff Quota (ATQ) regulations for some products to be pushed through as soon as possible, particularly given the current added uncertainties around Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic.

The European Commission's draft proposal on the new ATQ regulations for the coming 2021-2023 period is currently with European Council for negotiations, with them expected to go into force on January 1, 2021.

The EU Fish Processors and Traders Association (AIPCE-CEP) is urging the European Commission and European Council to finalize negotiations on the new regulation as soon as possible because, for certain seafood products, the ATQs are "a crucial guarantee of continuous and sustainable supply of raw material for the EU processing industry."

A fast decision on the quotas is particularly important this time around, given the economic and political uncertainty, the group said.

"This is key if we want to see employment stabilizing after the pressures suffered in the past months and key if we want to see the much-desired industry growth in Europe," said AIPCE.

The EU's reliance on imports is significant in every product category covered by the ATQs, according to AIPCE.

Since 2006, the dependence of the EU on imported materials for its markets has been consistent, remaining within the range of 63 percent. The 2019 Finfish study shows that for some items the EU



measures a 75 percent to 100 percent dependency on imported raw material, AIPCE noted.

“We need the new regulation in place by the end of the year. The draft proposal still needs to be approved in coming days to get the discussion going, it is now up to the Council but we are hoping for a decision in coming days,” Guus Pastoor, president of AIPCE, told IntraFish.

It could then take a couple of months for the ATQs to be finalized.

The ATQs have a huge impact for European processors since most start buying raw material after the summer, in September or October depending on the fishery, said Pastoor.

“If the regulation is not in place, processors will have to purchase without knowing tariffs and have to take into account import duties when offering products to customers,” he said.

Added anxieties of Brexit and COVID-19

Pastoor said the COVID-19 pandemic has brought to light the fragility of the seafood supply chain, particularly during a crisis.

A lot of the EU fleet has been tied up for a range of coronavirus-related reasons, and there is not enough demand for some locally caught species with the demise of foodservice.

“Coronavirus has shown the processing sector can go on because of imports of species such as pollock, cod, and salmon,” Pastoor said. “So we need a steady supply from outside the EU.”

Meanwhile, the ongoing discussions surrounding a trade agreement between the EU/UK and how that will ultimately work out is also another reason to set the ATQs as soon as possible, said Pastoor.

“We need to speed up the process, know what the situation is, and we need to know how to purchase products,” he said.

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