

PRESS RELEASE

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Release

SNP ANGER AT SPANISH FLEET FREE FOR ALL "COMMISSION HEADS MUST ROLL" - HUDGHTON

SNP Euro MP Ian Hudghton MEP has expressed anger at the European Commission's proposals for reform of the Common Fisheries Policy and said that "Commission heads must roll". His comments come after Fisheries Commissioner Mr Franz Fischler confirmed that Spanish fishermen will have full access to the North Sea from the end of this year. Mr Fischler also indicated that previous assurances on the principle of relative stability had been mere lip service and opened the possibility of Spanish fishermen getting quotas for North Sea resources. Furthermore, the Commission's proposals undermined the continued existence of the Shetland Box, which will now be the subject of a review in the next 18 months.

Mr Hudghton said:

"The announcement spells the end for restrictions on Spanish access to Scottish waters unless the Scottish fisheries minister mounts a vigorous defence of Scottish fishermen. From January 1st next year, the Spanish fleet will have full access to the North Sea.

"Furthermore, previous Commission assurances on the principle of relative stability appear to have been mere lip service. When questioned at yesterday's press conference, Mr Fischler refused to rule out the possibility of Spain getting access to North Sea quotas.

"Fischler's proposals also call for the Shetland Box to be reviewed by the end of 2003. Taken together, these particular proposals mark an ominous day for the Scottish fishing industry.

"The Scottish and UK governments must now fight to ensure that the Commission's proposals on access are never implemented. The UK Tory

government sold out on Scottish fisheries ten years ago; we must ensure that the present government doesn't do the same.

"The concerted Spanish conspiracy which the SNP has been warning of for years has now borne fruit: the Spanish fleet are close to gaining full access.

"The Commission has been complicit in this conspiracy - and now heads must roll".

Notes for editors

- At yesterday's press conference, Mr Fischler stated that after 31st December 2002 the Spanish and Portuguese fleets will have access to Community waters on a totally non-discriminatory basis. He confirmed that everyone would have access to non-quota species, whilst quotas for other fish would be available on a non-discriminatory manner taking account of relative stability.

When asked how to reconcile "non-discrimination" with relative stability, and how quotas would be allocated, Mr Fischler said "in concrete terms, I can't give you the exact kilos and tons...no discrimination is possible against the Spanish fleet".

- This apparent undermining of the principle of relative stability, whereby quotas are allocated to states based on historical fishing rights, is contrary to Mr Fischler's comments in a recent letter to Mr Hudghton where he stated that "the Commission does not for the time being see any viable alternative principle".
- Article 17 (2) of the proposed regulation on the conservation and sustainable exploitation of fisheries resources, published on 28th May 2002, allows for the continuation of the 12 mile zones, whilst Article 18 allows for the continuation of the Shetland Box. Article 19, however, states that:

"By 31 December 2003 the Commission shall present to the European Parliament and the Council a report on the rules concerning access to resources laid down in Community legislation other than those referred to in Article 17 (2), assessing the justification for these rules in terms of conservation and sustainable exploitation objectives."

This means that, whilst the 12 mile zones are not up for review next year, the Shetland Box is.

