

EU Social Partners position on EU autonomous tariff quotas for certain fishery products for the period 2019-2021

In view of the ongoing Council negotiations of the new set of autonomous tariff quotas (ATQs), the EU Social Partners would like to express great concern over the potential quota increase of zero-duties imports of fishery products which would have a major socio-economic impact for the European fishing sector.

EU and global fish stocks have recovered over the last decade and led to an increase of EU fishing fleet catches and landings. Therefore, generally speaking, the EU catching sector is currently meeting the needs of EU processors, providing the best quality whilst maintaining the highest standards. Contrary to these positives developments, some Member States encouraged by EU processing and retailer companies are requesting increased ATQs for the majority of the species included in the Annex of the Regulation. The European Union should give a clear signal that it does recognise the importance of the strong promotion of our European products.

Moreover, it should be highlighted that it is in the gutting and cleaning of the fish where the greatest number of jobs is required for the EU processing industry. Therefore, it is clear that increased imports of fish filets and loins already processed to the EU will result in a loss of said jobs for these companies and a decrease in first-sale prices. As a consequence of the latter factor, ATQs with a tariff duty of zero will also force the EU catching sector to sell their product in other international markets in search for better prices.

We believe that in practice ATQs serve the sole purpose of getting a better price from cheaper producers, who have no regard for sustainable standards, and not supply the EU market. As representatives of the EU fishing sector, we firmly believe that, instead of free trade based on zero tariffs, the EU should seek to establish fair trade with exporting countries. It is not acceptable that countries which are connected with IUU fishing and serious labour abuses shall be imposed tariffs on fishing imports rather than zero tariffs regimes.

What is more, we are of the strong opinion that the 10,000 tonnes of flatfish should be reduced to zero as there is plenty of flatfish quota in the EU (e.g. plaice) so no shortage in raw material occurs and therefore there is absolutely no need for extra supply to this market. Large volumes of cod, herring and hake are also benefiting from various trade-related measures, despite an improvement in the state of the stocks and in fishing opportunities for 2018.

We firmly believe that the processing sector has a legitimate and important role to play in supplying sufficient quantities of seafood to EU citizens. However, we are of the opinion that, in light of the socio-economic consequences of ATQs to the EU fishing industry, **this instrument must be solely used when there is no sufficient seafood supply for our markets and cannot be intended to put pressure on EU producers' prices.**