

All Party Parliamentary Group on Fisheries

Minutes of the Meeting between the APPG and the Norwegian Standing Committee on Business and Industry Affairs, held on Monday 20 January 2020, 15:15, Grand Committee Room, Westminster Hall.



Attendees

UK Parliamentarians

Sheryll Murray MP	Conservative, South East Cornwall
Rt Hon Alistair Carmichael MP	Liberal Democrat, Orkney and Shetland
Anthony Mangnall MP	Conservative, Totnes
Selaine Saxby MP	Conservative, North Devon
David Duguid MP	Conservative, Banff and Buchan
Lia Nici MP	Conservative, Great Grimsby
Neil Parish MP	Conservative, Tiverton and Honiton
Martin Vickers MP	Conservative, Cleethorpes
Chris Loder MP	Conservative, West Dorset
Scott Mann MP	Conservative, North Cornwall
Cherilyn Mackrory MP	Conservative, Truro and Falmouth
Dr Philippa Whitford MP	SNP, Central Ayrshire
Lord Greenway	Crossbench
Lord Russell of Liverpool	Crossbench
Lord McColl of Dulwich	Conservative
Lord Thurlow	Crossbench
Viscount Hanworth	Labour

Norway Parliamentarians

Geir Pollestad (Chair)	Centre Party, Rogaland
Steinar Reiten	Christian Democratic Party, Møre og Romsdal
André N. Skjelstad	Liberal Party, Nord-Trøndelag
Geir Adelsten Iversen	Centre Party, Finnmark
Bengt Rune Strifeldt	Progress Party, Finnmark
Cecilie Myrseth	Labour Party, Troms
Tom-Christer Nilsen	Conservative Party, Hordaland

Other Attendees

Simon Svenheim	Royal Norwegian Embassy in London
Jacob Ashton	APPG on Fisheries Secretariat

Minutes

Parliamentarians from both nations introduced themselves. It was explained that the APPG on Fisheries and other interested Parliamentarians were meeting the Norwegian Standing Committee on Business and Industry Affairs, given that the EFRA Select Committee were not currently sitting.

Geir Pollestad thanked UK Parliamentarians for taking the time to meet. He informed them that Norway's Progress Party had announced that day that they are leaving government. The Norwegian government is currently working on establishing a new fisheries policy and appointing a Minister of Fisheries.

Sheryll Murray MP said that the UK will soon be an independent coastal state, like Norway, and UK fisheries policy will evolve over the next twelve months. She stated that the UK Fisheries Minister will be representing the UK on regional committees (e.g. North Sea Advisory Council), as is the case for Norway.

Rt Hon Alistair Carmichael MP said that this was a fascinating moment to talk about fisheries, underscoring that the UK is on the brink of something new, but uncertain. He said that the UK will not be part of the Common Fisheries Policy, and exactly what fishing opportunities are offered will depend on the political will invested by the UK government. Carmichael emphasised that this will involve all parties working together. He drew attention to the fact that the UK will soon be in the transition period. Carmichael stated that Norway has a greater political investment in fishing than the UK, since it is a more important industry there, both culturally and economically. He asked, to what extent does this investment inform the nature of the work of the Norwegian government? Carmichael indicated that talks between the EU, the UK and Norway will be sure to follow. He expressed interest in future negotiations between Norway, Iceland and Scotland.

Chris Loder MP said that he came from a farming background. He commented that he sees leaving the EU as a great opportunity for farming and for fisheries. Fishing communities that once thrived now greatly struggle. He expressed an interest in learning about Norway's negotiations with the EU, and how that might influence the future of the UK.

Geir Pollestad said that fishing has great economic importance for Norway. He noted that there are two main fisheries areas for Norway: cod in the north, and pelagic species such as mackerel and herring in the south. The Norwegian government is working on a White Paper on new fisheries policies, trying to establish an easier system with less red tape. After Brexit, he hopes to make the table larger to find a new UK-Norway agreement. Pollestad highlighted that the UK and Norway are on the same page regarding sustainability, noting that it is important to look not just 5-10 years ahead, but 100-200 years.

Tom-Christer Nilsen said that, as with most countries, Norway had regulations in place to ensure a diversified fleet, and said that there are always discussions about what kind of regulations are optimal. He mentioned that both farming and fishing have seen massive increases in use of technology and productivity, but this has meant fewer hands are needed to catch the same amount of fish, which impacts communities. He stated that immediately after the Second World War, one in three Norwegians worked with fish or farming. He said that the policy framework that exists today was agreed with fishing organisations about 20 years ago. Right now, he said the Norwegian government are working on building on the established system, to make small, adaptive changes. He said there will be discussions about what the future system will be.

Sheryll Murray MP introduced Neil Parish, former Chair of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee.

Neil Parish MP said that, from the point of view of the current government, there is huge expectation concerning fishing policy as the UK leaves the EU, and there are complexities involved. For instance, he said, the UK has a huge appetite for cod from Norway and Iceland, but much of the fish that the UK catches is exported to Europe and elsewhere. He said that fishermen expect greater access to fish after Brexit, and that trade agreements are also needed. He said the Fisheries Bill will be an enabling bill, which is needed for negotiation out of the Common Fisheries Policy and will give ministers lots of powers. Parish said that these are 'interesting times' for the UK and Norway, and he expects that Norway will be clear with the UK about what it wants. He emphasised that the UK and Norway are good friends and could be even better friends when they are both independent coastal states. He expects both nations will keep in contact, and for negotiations to take place very shortly after 31 January. He said that the APPG and Select Committees are keeping an eye on what ministers are doing. He said that a lot has been promised in the run-up to Brexit; now the government has to deliver on these promises. He expressed admiration for Norway's policies on regulating fishing, closing and opening certain fishing areas in a responsive manner. He said that many MPs are keen to ensure that the UK gets its fair share of fish, along with reciprocal agreements of access and trade arrangements.

Sheryll Murray MP introduced Martin Vickers and Lia Nici, whose constituencies have significant seafood processing activity that relies on imports from Norway.

Martin Vickers MP said that many Cleethorpes residents work in seafood processing, and it is vital for local employment. He said this relies on trade with Norway, Iceland and the Faroe Islands. He asked if Norway sees any difficulties or opportunities in this regard in the face of Brexit.

Sheryll Murray MP asked if Norway's reciprocal agreement with the EU involved EU access to Norwegian waters in return for Norway's access to the EU market. She asked how much quota negotiated between Norway and the EU reaches the UK (currently within the EU), and whether this portion could be negotiated directly between Norway and the UK following Brexit.

Bengt Rune Strifeldt said that their fisheries agreements were primarily between Norway and Russia, with the EU treated as a third country.

Tom-Christer Nilsen said that Norway does not have an agreement with the EU regarding access to the EU market. He said that much of the EU fleet's access to Norwegian waters is due to historical rights, and that the two principal stock areas are also negotiated differently. For stocks in the North Sea (such as herring), he said that negotiations are traditionally based on where the fish stocks are at that point in time. He said that when Norway joined the European Economic Area, fisheries were kept completely separate, as was agriculture.

David Duguid MP said that there is a key difference between the UK and Norway, namely that the UK is becoming independent from the EU, whereas Norway has never been in the EU (because it would involve loss of fishing rights). He said that the UK as a newly independent coastal state shouldn't be any worse off than existing independent states, such as Norway.

He recalled the Norwegian ambassador to the UK (Wegger Chr. Strømmen) visiting Aberdeen, where the ambassador suggested that the North Sea connects rather than divides the UK and Norway. As in oil and gas (Duguid's previous career), he said there is a shared interest in best practice in safety, innovation and technology - 'a rising tide lifts all boats'. He asked where the UK and Norway could see co-benefits with regards to fisheries,

such as safety and sustainability of stocks, and highlights the importance of shared learning.

Geir Pollestad said that Norway welcomes cooperation between Norway and the UK. He represents the oil and gas capital of Norway, and said that the same sharing of innovation that took place for oil and gas can happen for fisheries. He pointed out that when Norway debated joining the EU in 1994, concerns over agriculture and fisheries were the main reasons that they did not join.

Viscount Hanworth asked whether Norway has a discard ban, and how long it has been operative if so.

Tom-Christer Nilsen said that Norway did have a discard ban, and any fish caught must be brought to shore with no exceptions. He said that the systems in place ensure that catch in excess of quota can still be caught but the returns must be given to the fishermen's co-operative, which will use the money towards bettering the fisheries. He said that this system has been operative for at least 30 years.

Sheryll Murray MP stated that the problem of the EU's discard ban (Landing Obligation) is that in mixed fisheries there is a bycatch limit, allowing landing of only 5% of non-quota species. She asked whether this happens in Norway.

Tom-Christer Nilsen said it does, but the limit is 10% of non-quota species.

Sheryll Murray MP suggested that the new UK Fisheries Bill should allow a higher percentage of bycatch than the EU, with the returns going into a fund for scientific assessment of stocks and selective gear development.

Alistair Carmichael MP said that for a discard ban to work, quota has to match what is in the sea. He noted that problems lie in the setting of quota rather than the discard ban per se. He admires Norway for involving the fishing industry in setting quota and surrounding negotiations. He asked what formal mechanisms allow fishermen's organisations to influence these decisions.

Tom-Christer Nilsen said it was complicated to explain orally, but offered to send an explanation in writing.

David Duguid MP identified that becoming an independent state gives the chance to change policy that doesn't work. He asked how Norway manages a more dynamic approach.

Geir Pollestad said that the system is adapted often, but conflict remains between different groups.

Simon Svenheim added that the system is responsive. For example, he said, a skipper can get in touch with the director, who can get in touch with the ministry, who can make the call to (for example) close a fishery within 30 minutes. He said he believes it is difficult for the EU's system to streamline this process effectively.

Pause for group photo. A number of UK Parliamentarians leave.

Anthony Mangnall MP said he is particularly interested in the resilience and governance of the Norwegian fleet. He said that Brexit could allow a greater degree of support for investing in the fleet.

Steinar Reiten said that Norway's legislation on vessel ownership does not allow big multinationals. He said that owners of Norwegian vessels must have been an active

fisherman in the last 3-5 years, and must have a Norwegian address. He said that this means that the fleet (and their negotiators) represent Norwegian coastal communities.

Neil Parish MP asked whether fisheries agreements come under pressure from Russia.

Steiner Reiten responded, saying that Norway has good relations with Russia. He said that stocks of cod and haddock in the north-east have had agreements running since the mid-1970s.

Scott Mann MP stated that he is impressed with Norway's agriculture and fisheries scheme. He asked how much involvement the EU has with environmental decisions in Norway's waters - for instance, whether Norway can ban EU vessels pulse fishing in Norwegian waters.

Geir Pollestad said that yes, Norway has the capacity to make these environmental decisions, given it is their waters.

Cherilyn Mackrory MP asked how easy it is to manage areas so they do not become overfished, and asked how Norway manages supertrawlers.

Geir Pollestad said that there is an ongoing debate about fisheries management between fishermen and scientists/managers. However, he said that fishing organisations are also proud of Norway's management, and said that all groups accept there is continuous debate. He stated that there are approximately 6,000 fishing vessels in Norway, and that all parties agree that ownership of vessels should be in the hands of Norwegians.

Sheryll Murray MP asked how Norway distinguishes between the inshore and offshore fleet - for instance by size of vessel, the area fished and/or their quota share.

Tom-Christer Nilsen said it is complex but, simply put, they account for all those factors. Nielsen detailed the following points:

- The main system accounts for length, with differences in quota depending on vessel length, and most of the 6,000 vessels are below 15m. Other classifications are given to large trawlers.
- Norway distinguishes between pelagic fishing vessels and smaller vessels.
- Quota cannot be transferred from a small vessel to a trawler. Nielsen noted that there are discussions about whether these separations should be stronger, as currently quota can be moved up or down one category of vessel size.
- Norway does not have a 6/12 nautical mile limit for vessels, but does limit how far towards shore trawlers can come. Smaller vessels are limited in how far out they can go, but this is due to safety measures rather than fishing regulations.
- There are also regulations on how much fish can be stored.

Fishermen seem to like the system on the whole, he believes.

Sheryll Murray MP said that she used to be the chair of a fish producer organisation, whose members ranged from beam trawlers to very small vessels, so she understands vessel diversity.

Steinar Reiten said that Norwegian politicians listen to fishing organisations. He said that quota is based on recommendation from ICES, then fishermen decide how to divide it. He said that usually trawlers get roughly one-third of Atlantic cod quota, and coastal vessels get two-thirds.

Viscount Hanworth asked whether out-of-quota catch is based on size (with regards to discards). He also asked how it is regulated and how the system has progressed.

Tom-Christer Nilsen indicated that Norway does not have this problem. He stated that all catch comes ashore, although one or two vessels will break the law - and they are prosecuted.

Sheryll Murray MP asked how Norway defines minimum landing size and mesh size.

Tom-Christer Nilsen said that fisheries directors decide this.

Sheryll Murray MP asked about incentives to install larger mesh sizes and similar measures.

Tom-Christer Nilsen explained that various tools and fish-locating technologies help vessels avoid smaller fish. He said that all landings count against quota, with no exceptions.

Scott Mann MP said that Norway has centralised quota, and asked whether they have considered dividing it at the regional level.

Tom-Christer Nilsen said that this idea has been debated and tested, but the conclusion was that it didn't work well.

Sheryll Murray MP asked whether quotas are still defined by ICES.

Tom-Christer Nilsen said that they are. He said they form part of the national set quota, which makes sure they fulfil the obligations of international conventions.

Geir Pollestad made closing remarks, saying that all UK Parliamentarians present would be welcome in Norway.

Sheryll Murray MP thanked the Norwegian Parliamentarians, and expressed hopes that there will be opportunities to learn further from Norway as the UK develops its fisheries policy.

Meeting ends.