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POLICY PAPER ON **FISHERIES**

 **FIANNA FÁIL**
THE REPUBLICAN PARTY



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SPOKESPERSON ON MARINE & FISHERIES

FOREWORD

Fianna Fáil is committed to delivering a seafood industry that is strong, sustainable and profitable and one that supports fishing and related economic activities in the coastal communities they are based in.

Fisheries and marine resources are key contributors for our national economic recovery with close to 11,000 people employed in this vital sector. Fianna Fáil policy in prioritising fisheries, not only recognises the potential of the fishing sector to contribute to economic development but also its capacity to achieve balanced regional growth.



Coastal communities and inland fisheries' areas invariably suffer from a lack of industrial and economic development. We believe that coastal communities must be allowed to maintain and increase jobs in the catching, supply and processing sectors in order to prosper. The expansion of fishing opportunities, processing capacity, seaweed production, aquaculture, marine tourism, rural recreation, and marine renewables, bring much needed jobs to deprived areas.

“Coastal communities must be allowed to maintain and increase jobs in the catching, supply and processing sectors in order to prosper.”

We will continue to fight for maximum sustainable quotas for the Irish fishing industry in the annual fixing of EU catches and quotas.

Fianna Fáil is determined that Ireland's interests will be protected in any reformed EU Common Fisheries Policy and will seek to achieve this in future reviews with a view to enlarge the fishing opportunities.

Securing a level playing field for all fishing activities in Irish controlled waters is another key priority, while introducing a more flexible and proportionate approach to inspections is a must.

The coming years offer a real opportunity for the sector to grow and expand offering high quality affordable produce to consumers across Ireland and the world. Any balanced regional recovery must ensure that coastal communities' are at the centre of government policy. In this policy document, Fianna Fail provides a platform to achieve this.

John Browne TD

Spokesperson on Marine & Fisheries

Summary of Policy Approach

Fianna Fáil in Government will:

1. Appoint a Minister with full responsibility for fisheries and place all responsibility for fisheries including inland fisheries and marine leisure in a single government department.
2. Prioritise fisheries and marine resources such as harvesting high quality indigenous marine species, seafood processing, bio marine ingredients, seaweed production and marine renewables, as key contributors for our national economic recovery, job creation and balanced regional growth.
3. Promote sustainable fishing and aquaculture practices to achieve long term security of fish stocks and incomes of fishermen and related sectors.
4. Encourage sustainable and high quality aquaculture development. Resolve the current unacceptable regime of licensing and establish an independent body to adjudicate and administer the system. Encourage local participation in aquaculture developments and promote the development of new treatments to eliminate and avoid diseases in a safe and sustainable way.
5. Develop and implement a specialised policy for traditional coastal fishing areas in consultation with those communities to ensure their continued contribution to the local economy. This policy will ensure co-ordination between various bodies to develop a combined approach to tourist, marine and rural recreation activities.
6. Build on the success of the “Wild Atlantic Way” and explore creating an “Irish Way” on an island of Ireland basis in co-operation with Northern Ireland.
7. Devote enhanced resources for scientific research and advice.
8. Fight for maximum sustainable quotas for the Irish fishing industry in the annual fixing of EU catches and quotas.
9. Seek to reform the EU Common Fisheries Policy in future reviews with a view to enlarge the fishing opportunities (days at sea, fishing gear, quotas) for the Irish industry. Apportion particular attention to the needs of the inshore fleet as additional fishing opportunities become available.

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10. In relation to the implementation of the discards ban (landing obligation), seek the immediate implementation of the avoidance and minimisation measures as contained in the new CFP. Ensure maximum flexibility in applying the regulatory regime, including a more flexible approach to the transfer of quotas and the landing of catches. Invest in enhanced facilities to cope with increased landings, their storage and processing.
 11. Secure a level playing field for all fishing activities in Irish controlled waters.
 12. Introduce a more flexible and proportionate approach to inspections. Vessels subject to inspection on returning to port to be dealt with promptly.

Fisheries Sector Overview

The Irish fisheries sector employs some 10,800 persons in fulltime and part time jobs in coastal communities' right around the country. In 2014, exports alone were worth approximately €519 million.

Fianna Fáil is committed to those communities and the sector for the following reasons:

- Ireland's fishery sector is an essential part of the Irish economy.
- It is a fundamental element of coastal community life.
- It is vital for employment, tourism, recreation and the environment.

In recognition of its vital contribution in so many ways Fianna Fáil in Government will pursue and implement its policies to enhance that contribution.

Ireland, taken together with its seabed, is one of the largest states in the European Union. Yet problems persist.

For 2015, the EU fixed total allowable catches in Irish waters of 1.3 million tonnes but Irish vessels are limited to catching 314,079 tonnes. Some 70% of fish exports are in commodity form. Fianna Fáil will fight for extra Irish quotas. This is a core policy.

Meanwhile, aquaculture production is a mere 35,000 tonnes, down from over 60,000 tonnes in 2005 and progress is hindered by unacceptable delays in granting licenses.

Food Harvest 2020, initiated under Fianna Fáil in government, is providing a medium-term vision and strategy for the development of the Irish agri food and fisheries sector for the period 2010-2020.

Food Wise 2025 builds on the visionary Food Harvest 2020 blueprint. However, the litmus test will be ensuring fishing incomes and profitability levels improve in this period through adding value and diversification of product and complying with our environmental responsibilities.

Policy Recommendations

Appoint a Minister with full responsibility for fisheries

- In order to promote fully Ireland's fishing interests it is essential to have a Minister dedicated to that job. Trying to combine such a substantial responsibility with other significant roles does not work. Such multi-tasking results in fisheries being downgraded too often.
- A dedicated Minister can prioritise the needs of fisheries, pursue the full implementation of policies, promote the development of downstream processing, lead the expansion of exports and marine tourism and devote the time to negotiate the best deals possible at EU and international level.

Prioritise fisheries and marine resources as key contributors for our national economic recovery

- In prioritising fisheries and marine resources, Fianna Fáil policy not only recognises the potential this sector has to contribute to economic development but also its capacity to achieve balanced regional growth.
- Coastal communities and inland fisheries' areas invariably suffer from a lack of industrial and economic development. The expansion of fishing opportunities, processing capacity, seaweed production, aquaculture, marine tourism, rural recreation, and marine renewables, bring much needed jobs to deprived areas.
- Workers in the fishing sector must be guaranteed all employment rights and protections (pay, terms and conditions) in accordance with existing regulations during their employment period.

Enable inshore boats to provide marine tourism activities

- The inshore fishing fleet sustains fishing communities nationwide. The sector comprises more than 80% of the total fishing fleet consisting of boats of less than 12 metres in length. In addition, inshore fishing is principally active within six nautical miles of the Irish shore.
- Scaling up is not an option for these boats due to the quotas regime so possessing the opportunity to decide to diversify into other economic activities is a must. Inshore fishermen need the scope to try to develop marine tourism projects around their current core business. However, allowing inshore fishing boats to be also used in a marine tourism capacity is not permissible by current regulations.

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- Fianna Fáil is committed to changing the existing regime pertaining to fishing boat licenses that currently restrict fishermen from engaging in marine tourism activities. Permitting those to engage in this activity would entail insurance, health & safety, and maintenance responsibilities. However, changing the existing regulations would enhance the economic activities in coastal communities, while leading to the sustainable development of fisheries areas.

Establish an independent body to adjudicate and administer the aquaculture licensing system

- To streamline the tasks of a dedicated Minister all responsibilities for fisheries and aquaculture, including inland fisheries, should be placed in a single government department.
- The confusion and conflicts that arise where responsibility lies with different departments, and agencies reporting to different departments, must be eliminated.
- Such a single entity will facilitate an efficient decision making process for aquaculture license applicants, reduce the negative impact of excessive bureaucracy, and enhance job creation.

Develop and implement a special policy for traditional coastal fishing communities

- Fianna Fáil will pay particular attention to traditional coastal and island communities with historical dependence on fishing. In consultation with these communities specific measures will be identified to boost the local economy and coordination between the various official bodies to develop a combined approach will be ensured.
- Fianna Fáil would examine best international practice from countries like Canada and the UK in relation to sustainable traditional fishing activities (such as eel fishing). By involving coastal communities, this will ensure community buy in and have the added benefit of both preserving such indigenous species and maintaining activities that have existed for hundreds of years.
- New opportunities for development must be recognised – in particular the sustainable development of seaweed harvesting and processing must be encouraged through investment in research.
- We would also plan and develop an enhanced inland fisheries policy in cooperation with Inland Fisheries Ireland.

Oireachtas report on promoting sustainable rural coastal and island communities

- We commend the work of the all-party Oireachtas Joint Sub-Committee on Fisheries and its Report on Promoting Sustainable Rural Coastal and Island Communities. There is a strong evidence base of data in this report with many salient policy recommendations.
- It is disappointing that this extensive report has not been taken more seriously by the government considering the all-party buy in.
- Fianna Fail agrees with the recommendation to initiate the establishment of an umbrella organisation in respect of the coastal/estuary/inshore/island environment and marine leisure.
- Drawing on the experience of Comhairle na Tuaithe this would bring together the relevant Government Departments, statutory voluntary agencies, NGO's and other interests to explore how best they could coordinate their activities in order to make the greatest socio-economic impact.

Promoting community tourism

- The south coast of Ireland is growing its reputation as a whale and dolphin tourist attraction – it would be beneficial if local inhabitants could get involved and benefit from marine tourism opportunities.
- Community tourism in rural and fishing communities has the potential to offer an authentic, genuine visitor experience to tourists that they would not get in the main urban centres or other large scale commercially operated businesses. Permitting the dual use of inshore boats would enable such communities to exploit their tourism potential.
- Fianna Fail will also build on the success of the “Wild Atlantic Way” and explore creating an “Irish Way” on an island of Ireland basis in co-operation with Northern Ireland, which would extend the current route.

Encouraging sustainable and environmentally friendly fishing

- Increased fish catches and aquaculture production is not enough in itself. Such development must be sustainable and environmentally friendly. As increased production will be aimed at export markets it is vital to maintain the high standards that give Ireland an international reputation for quality envied by many.
- Sustainable fishing practises are essential for the long term viability of the industry and Fianna Fáil policy will encourage such practises through incentive measures. This will ensure stability of employment and incomes.

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- In light of stock recovery, we will review the current policy relating to salmon fisheries.

Devote enhanced resources for scientific research and advice

- Like all sectors of food production scientific research in the fisheries area is essential. Policy making in Brussels when fishing opportunities are being decided is based on a scientific assessment of fish stocks.
- It is essential for Ireland to have highly qualified and internationally reputable scientists contributing to policy formation and to provide evidence for maximum fishing opportunities for Irish fishermen.
- Research is constantly needed into new fishing techniques, the use of modern technology and the behaviour of stocks. Adequate supports must be available to ensure the accurate collection of data, in particular by smaller vessels while avoiding excessive bureaucracy.
- We fully support the work of the Marine Institute established under a Fianna Fáil government. It plays a pivotal role in enhancing scientific research in the marine environment, while the commissioning of the Celtic Explorer vessel has also strengthened Ireland's research capability in the field.
- In aquaculture new treatments need to be developed to eliminate and avoid diseases and parasites in a safe and sustainable way. Fianna Fáil will ensure that enhanced resources are available to provide scientific research and advice.

Maximise the benefits from the EU Common Fisheries Policy

- Fianna Fáil in government will continue to defend Ireland's national fishing interest in any negotiations and future reviews on the Common Fisheries Policy.
- We strongly support the view to enlarge the fishing opportunities (days at sea, fishing gear, quotas) for the Irish industry and, more importantly, to ensure fish stocks and the coastal communities that depend on them are to be sustained on a viable basis.

Fighting for maximum quotas in annual fixing of EU catches and quotas

- Important policy and management decisions relating to fisheries and aquaculture are now taken in Brussels on a regular basis. As already stated a dedicated Minister is best placed to pursue Ireland's interests on an ongoing basis, having regular meetings and contacts with the European Commission and Ministers from other Member States.
- Having an active input into policy at the formation stage pays dividends down the line. This is particularly so in the annual fixing of fishing opportunities and quotas.
- Waiting until the Commission publishes its proposals means fighting a rearguard action. Putting forward solid arguments, based on substantial evidence, can deliver higher quotas, more days at sea and benefits relating to fishing gear used.

Ensure maximum flexibility in applying discards ban/landing obligation

- The implementation of the discards ban/landing obligation presents challenges but also opportunities. It is important to avail of the maximum flexibility possible to allow a smooth implementation of this new regulatory measure.
- We will seek the immediate implementation of the avoidance and minimisation measures as contained in the new CFP, particularly as regards the transfer of quotas and the landing of catches. The management of the system must facilitate the fishermen so that they have respect for it and positively contribute to its implementation.

A more flexible and proportionate approach to inspections

- Fianna Fáil will ensure that port facilities and inspections are adequate to meet the new demands of the system. It is not acceptable that vessels are delayed from landing their catches due to the absence of inspectors, particularly as fish need to get to market or processing facilities as quickly as possible.

Invest in enhanced facilities to cope with increased landings, their storage and processing

- The landing obligation presents opportunities for the expansion of processing in Irish ports. Foreign vessels will now find it more convenient to land their catches in ports close to the fishing grounds rather than steam back to their home port - a practise facilitated in the past by discarding unwanted fish and high grading.

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- If three quarters of the fishing opportunities in Irish waters are allocated to foreign vessels we should take every measure to encourage them to land their catches in Irish ports and use our processing facilities.
 - Fianna Fáil will provide the necessary incentives to improve port capacity, and the storage and processing of these additional catches. We will also encourage the development of downstream processing to gain the benefits of value added products.



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