



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Virginijus Sinkevičius  
Member of the Commission

Brussels, 22/02/2024  
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THE RT HON STEVE BARCLAY  
Secretary of State Environment, Food & Rural Affairs  
Seacole Building  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF, UK

**Subject:       Announcement of new marine protected areas and measures to prohibit the fishing of sandeel within United Kingdom waters of the North Sea.**

Dear Secretary of State,

Thank you for your letter of 30 January 2024, announcing the intention to bring into effect 13 new marine protected areas (MPAs) and measures to prohibit the fishing of sandeel within United Kingdom waters of the North Sea.

The European Union is committed to effectively reducing the environmental and climate impacts of fisheries. Protecting and restoring marine ecosystems for sustainable and resilient fisheries is indeed a shared ambition which has been the basis of our close cooperation and good results. I would like to underscore however that measures for the protection and restoration of marine ecosystems need to comply with the principles and obligations under the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA).

My team will liaise with yours to better understand the rationale and implications of the measures you envisage in 13 MPAs, noting that in each, the big majority of activity affected by the prohibition of bottom towed fishing gear is associated with EU vessels.

As regards the full closure of the sandeel fishery, the Commission services and the Member States have, on multiple occasions, expressed serious concerns as regards the measure's compliance with the proportionality, non-discrimination principles and obligations under the TCA. I regret that the United Kingdom has adopted such a restrictive measure that will fundamentally affect EU vessels which will be deprived of fishing opportunities, and that will undercut the Union's access to UK waters. A full closure of the fishery appears to disregard alternative measures which could meet the same objective but have a less significant socio-economic impact on the concerned EU vessels and our processing industry. In addition, the announced measures clearly fail to consider the long-term social and economic sustainability as well as the optimum utilisation of shared stocks.

Against this background, I trust that the United Kingdom will reconsider the decision of a full closure of the sandeel fishery, with special regard to its compatibility with the obligations and

principles of the TCA and as such will account for the concerns raised in this letter. In this regard, the Union reserves its right to make use of available means under the TCA to reach a mutually agreeable solution on this matter.

I remain available to discuss these matters with you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'V. Sinkevičius', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Virginijus Sinkevičius