

**Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> May 2018**  
**For Immediate Release.**

**ISLAND fishermen are upping the ante on a campaign to allow them to access the fishery resource in small boats off their shores.**

The proposed Islands Heritage License Bill - which passed second stage in the Dáil in February - is due to go to Committee in the coming weeks. Fishermen from around the country have asked politicians across all parties to keep the momentum up at this critical stage.

The Bill proposes a small percentage of the Irish national quota to be allocated to the islands in the form of non-transferable community quota - a move which they say will prevent island populations from dwindling.

Irish Islands Marine Resource Organisation (IIMRO) chairman Jerry Early said: "My great-grandfather, grandfather, father and I have fished around the island of Arranmore sustainably for generations. I only want the opportunity for my son to be able to do the same."

Under the proposed Bill, this quota, which is a public resource, would be accessible by under twelve meter island boats on the polyvalent general register, to fish on a seasonal basis as weather and fish availability allow.

Fish caught by low impact fishing gear in such a manner would benefit the island economies by providing direct income to small-scale fishers and high quality fresh fish for island eateries. Consumers are increasingly insisting on traceable, sustainably caught fish which they will spend money on to support small communities. Island visitors are often surprised by the absence of a range of locally caught fresh fish on the islands.

IIMRO have already worked closely with European partners to ensure the legislation complies with all EU directives and the Common Fishery Policy. They have been given the green light at European level and now look forward to the bill being written into Irish law.

Politicians from across the political spectrum gathered to launch a report called "Report on Promoting Sustainable Rural Coastal and Island Communities" on the small island of Inis Oírr, Co. Galway, in January 2014. The cross-party publication was produced by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Fisheries and is the culmination of years of consultations, submissions and attendance at meetings in the Dáil by many groups of stakeholders including state agencies and the Department of the Marine. Islanders were heartened by the official launch on the island and the contents of the report gave an added impetus to the long campaign to regain traditional seasonal fishing opportunities around their islands.

One of the recommendations in the report is for the introduction of a "heritage licence.... Such licenses would, optimally facilitate traditional fishing practices...".

Islanders have historically used seasonal fisheries as a mainstay of living on their islands. Mixed with small-scale agriculture, tourism and occasional migrant labour, seasonal fishing allows islanders to stay year round on the islands, raise their families and maintain fragile communities as well as ensuring the protection of the fishery resource.

In more recent years island fishermen have been limited by a series of restrictions, to fishing for non-quota species, such as crab and lobster, from one end of the year to the other. This has resulted in increased pressure on these stocks as more and more boats are pushed by necessity into the pot fisheries around the coast.

Traditionally common fishery policy quota species were fished in season, in harmony with the weather and natural cycles around the islands; herring were netted close to shore in late Autumn/Winter, mackerel were fished in Summer, whitefish such as pollack were caught in Spring, cod in February and flatfish in early Summer. Non-quota crab and lobster were a Summer/Autumn fishery.

By limiting access to the fishery resource by fleet segment and the requirement for track record, whereby only boats that had catches logged during certain index years were allowed to fish a particular species, island boats have been squeezed to the margins of fisheries across the country.

The island heritage license bill does not include Salmon.

The heritage bill is a bottom-up initiative spearheaded from the offshore islands, who are fighting to maintain their communities in the face of a policy of increased industrialisation of fisheries.

Supported by local and national politicians, the Bill follows on from a successful island-led campaign to have offshore islands specially recognised by the European Union in the 2012 common fishery policy, a result of extensive work by islanders since 2006.

ENDS

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