

Northeast Atlantic Mackerel/The Villains

Written by Administrator

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Tempers have flared in Europe during recent weeks as EU and particularly Scottish fishermen and politicians denounce the unilateral quotas for Northeast Atlantic mackerel established by Iceland and the Faroe Islands. Iceland unilaterally raised its mackerel quota from 2,000 to 130,000 tons for the year in early August, and the Faroese raised their 25,000-ton quota to 85,000 tons. Historically the highly migratory mackerel stock was harvested primarily by vessels from the EU and Norway who agreed on the Total Allowable Catch. These two major players gave token quotas to the other two players, crumbs from the table, so to speak. Changes in ocean temperatures have resulted in the mackerel moving further north than usual and hence rendered them more accessible to fishermen from Iceland and the Faroe Islands. In the absence of international agreement within the Northeast Atlantic Fisheries Organization (NEAFC), Iceland and the Faroese were free to set their own quotas. A Faroese-registered trawler was blocked by local fishermen as it attempted to offload its catch in Scotland. Scottish politicians have warned that Iceland is jeopardizing negotiations to join the EU. The EU has threatened to retaliate by withdrawing all rights for Icelandic and Faroese trawlers to catch any fish in European waters.

The fact is that the mackerel have deviated from their historical migration pattern. The EU and Norway need to make adjustments to the allocation scheme to accommodate the legitimate claims of Iceland and the Faroese, given the changed migration patterns. The EU and Norway do not own the resource and must share in a reasonable manner with their northern neighbours. The EU's claims of Icelandic overfishing ring hollow given that EU vessels have plundered the straddling fish stocks of the Northwest Atlantic for decades in defiance of internationally agreed quotas, exploiting loopholes in the NAFO convention (see The NAFO Chronicles).

TAGS: Northeast Atlantic mackerel, overfishing, sustainable, fisheries, fishing, EU, Norway, Faroe Islands, NEAFC, NAFO, unilateral quotas, migration patterns

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