

**STATEMENT TO BE MADE BY THE MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT
ON TUESDAY 11th MAY 2021**

Fishing licences issued under the UK/EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement

Today, I would like to update the Assembly on the ongoing work of the Government to address the important issues we face around fishing licences issued under the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement (“the TCA”) and, more specifically, the conditions included in those licences.

This follows the response last week to the first licences issued to larger vessels, following the 4-month amnesty period which ended on 30 April, and a demonstration held in St Helier by fishermen from neighbouring Normandy and Brittany.

The Government of Jersey wishes to move beyond recent events and work to find a resolution. We believe the approach which we communicated to the EU at the end of last week makes this achievable.

As Members will recall, on 27th December 2020 the Assembly unanimously endorsed the recommendation of the Council of Ministers that Jersey should be a party to the TCA for goods. In respect of fishing licences this decision, and the obligations it imposed on the Government of Jersey, required amendments to the legislation which regulates fishing activity in Jersey’s waters. The legislative amendments then subsequently gave the Government the powers to draft updated licence conditions and to ensure that any activity in our waters met the requirements of the TCA for managed, sustainable fishing.

The TCA becoming legally effective from 1st January 2021, the Government moved quickly to establish a 4-month amnesty period during which time licensing arrangements could be confirmed and legislation drawn up. During the amnesty period, officers in the Marine Resources team reviewed the data supplied by the French authorities via Paris, the EU Commission and DEFRA – a line of communication required under the TCA – in application for licences to fish in Jersey waters.

I presented the required legislation to the Assembly during the April sitting at which it was adopted. By Friday 30 April, the end of the amnesty, we had allocated 41 licences to larger vessels with VMS technology, with another 14 applications pending following receipt of the request for a licence and the associated data on that morning.

As Members know, the amnesty period for smaller vessels without VMS technology is due to run until 30 June.

Members have seen the response that those licences we issued, and the conditions they included, invoked from a significant number of French fishermen. There are undoubtedly lessons that can be learnt from the position we found ourselves in. The channels of communication required by the TCA have not helped anyone in Jersey, Normandy, or Brittany. There has been some misinterpretation and misunderstanding of the terms of the TCA, and also of the licences that we have issued.

It is not my intention to dwell on the events of last week – we want to move forward. I respect the right of peaceful protest. My Assistant Minister, Deputy Guida, and officers from the Marine

Resources and External Relations teams met with representatives of the French fishermen on-board vessels tied up alongside in our harbour to understand their concerns first-hand. This was a constructive dialogue.

To seek a continued de-escalation, I have liaised with the appropriate parties in the EU via the UK to seek a resolution. We are willing to give until 1 July for those vessels we licenced to provide additional information as to their historic fishing record. We will act swiftly to ensure that vessels which submit the required additional evidence to demonstrate their previous record in Jersey waters will have that reflected in their licence and their activities will not be disrupted.

To that end, we have offered to postpone the implementation of individual limits on days at sea and on gear until 1 July for licenced vessels. Technical meetings are occurring today with the EU and UK to further clarify these matters.

In addition, we have redeployed fluent French speaking staff already employed by Government to the Marine Resources team to enable ease of communication for French fishers who contact the team directly. This will be made easier by the imminent established of a direct phone line for these contacts to be made and we have already discussed this and emailed French fishermen to facilitate their queries.

Members will note the Order which came out of the La Manche Department on Friday evening, closing the Norman Ports of Granville, Barneville-Carteret and Dielette for Jersey vessels undertaking commercial operations, including the unloading of fishery products. We referred, via the UK, notice of that decision to the Commission and I am pleased that the decision has now been revoked.

Our objective remains to find a way forward for all fishers who have a proven economic link to Jersey waters and to return to the cordial, positive relations we have enjoyed for decades with our closest neighbours in Normandy and Brittany.

Our new licensing regime is needed to achieve a long-term sustainable fishery for all fishermen. The licensing conditions applied to both EU and our boats will in time, provide the framework ensure that we do not exceed maximum sustainable fishing effort, a principle fundamental to the TECA and other International Agreements. In recent years several of our fish stocks have been declining due to over-fishing and we need to ensure the effort is reduced. If we are successful, this will ensure that both ourselves and the EU are able to continue to enjoy this valuable natural resource in perpetuity. Both our fishermen and those of the EU have this responsibility.

There is work still to do – lessons to learn, bridges to build and relations to reinstate. This will take time and be ongoing. We have challenges ahead, and we should expect difficulties again in the future, but I hope they can be managed more calmly next time.

I have been encouraged by the assistance offered by several Members over the past week, and the measured response of colleagues to the challenges we faced. These have been much appreciated and will be important as we move forward. I ask Members for their continued support as we navigate our post-Brexit relationship with our neighbours and seek to preserve and strengthen the links we have in this part of the world.