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Government Receives Preliminary Report.

Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar has now received a Preliminary Report from the experts it appointed to analyse fisheries in British Gibraltar Territorial Waters.

The Preliminary Report is based on the discussions held with members of the Working Group established by the Government and the data provided by Spanish fishermen, Spanish fisheries experts and a number of Gibraltar fishing clubs which have provided detailed data on records of catches.

In their Preliminary Report, the Government's experts reflect that the data made available has been useful in understanding what species recreational fishermen in Gibraltar are targeting; the trends in these data (in particular trends in catches and status of the stocks) for some of the commercial species targeted by Spanish fishermen; and trends in catches for the Gibraltar clubs.

Despite this, the experts go on to state that there are, however, serious gaps in the data which hamper further analysis, at this stage, including:

1. the location of the catches being landed in Spain;
2. the status of the fishing stocks;
3. the biology and population dynamics of these relevant species;
4. quantification of the impact of either commercial or recreational fisheries on the species fished; and
5. broader environmental impacts of fishing activities.

The Preliminary Report identifies that a number of species may be over-exploited and that this is affecting catches. In particular, the Preliminary Report also provides that a further examination of the data is required before specific conclusions about the state of the stocks around Gibraltar can be drawn.

In the coming weeks, attempts will, therefore, be made to access and analyse additional information which may provide further insights and the basis for more concrete and substantial recommendations.

This further collection of data will not require fishing to be allowed by Government. It is not recommended by the experts in their Preliminary Report and will, therefore, not be approved or permitted by the Government.

The Preliminary Report concludes that:

“Based on the lack of complete and critical information on which sound fisheries management measures and actions can be based, a precautionary approach is recommended at this time. The level of uncertainty associated with most of the species including whether some species spend part of their life cycle in BGTW (for example, during their juvenile or breeding stage) and the impacts of fishing methods on the marine environment within BGTW, provides sufficient evidence to support a moratorium on commercial fishing within the BGTW. Robust monitoring and assessment programmes need to be established and implemented to collect and evaluate the marine environment around Gibraltar and provide a basis for robust management actions. It would be prudent that, until such time and when the supporting legislation and framework for implementing fisheries conservation and management measures are in place, the Gibraltar Government maintains its current position on prohibiting commercial fishing in BGTW”.

The Government is mindful of the impact that the provisions of the Nature Protection Act have on those to rely on fishing for their livelihoods and has therefore maintained throughout that its concerns in respect of this matter relate both to the need to uphold Gibraltar law and to ensure that the law serves the conservatory purposes for which it was intended when enacted, now over twenty years ago.

It was for these reasons that the experts have been engaged to prepare a report to Government.

The Chief Minister made clear to representatives of the Spanish fishermen, whom he met in early August, that if the Preliminary Report, which was expected by 16th August, recommended that they should be allowed to fish to enable data collection on Gibraltar specific catches, they would be granted permits to fish to collect this data - in keeping with provisions of the Act.

Some Spanish fishermen’s representatives interpreted that as meaning that they would be able to fish as from that date without reference to the recommendations of the Preliminary Report. This was corrected by Mr Picardo in an interview immediately after the meeting and in the Government’s press release of the same day.

In the circumstances, and based on the recommendations of the Preliminary Report, the Government has to maintain its current position requiring full observance of the provision of the Nature Protection Act 1991. The Government will, therefore, not grant any permit to allow fishing with nets in British Gibraltar Territorial Waters in contravention of section 10 of the Act.

Also in keeping with the Preliminary Report recommendations, the Government will continue to work with the experts involved to develop robust monitoring and assessment programmes to evaluate, manage and protect the marine environment around Gibraltar.

Given the current preliminary nature of the report, it will not be made public at this stage. The Government intends that the final report of the experts should be published in full.