



HM GOVERNMENT OF GIBRALTAR
PRESS OFFICE
No.6 Convent Place
Gibraltar
Tel:20070071; Fax: 20043057

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HMGOG reiterates its position on Fishing

- Sustainability and stock replenishment remains paramount consideration.
- Draft Legislation to be published shortly.
- Consultation ongoing with fishing and environmental groups.

Following the statements made by Spanish Foreign Minister Jose Manuel Garcia Margallo at the Press Conference held after yesterday's meeting of EU Foreign Minister in Brussels, Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar reiterates its policy remains one of goodwill towards resolving differences in the so-called "fishing dispute".

HMGOG has made it absolutely clear from the beginning that it does not seek to exclude Spanish fishermen from BGTW, but that fishing had to be in keeping with Gibraltar law.

The Chief Minister, the Deputy Chief Minister and the Minister for the Environment have held various meetings in the past 14 months with fishermen from the "Cofradia" and the Mayors of La Linea (on a number of occasions) and Algeciras (once) to consider the issues that arise from the fishing practices used by the fishermen which were contrary to the Nature Protection Act.

The Fishing Report was commissioned by the Government from some of the top experts in the world and included advice from Spanish experts and consultation with the fishermen in question in order to advise the Government on this sensitive subject.

The recent laying of the artificial reef was therefore designed to protect fish stocks in the area in line with the recommendations in the said Fishing Report and in keeping with sound replenishment and sustainability principles. It is worth noting that over 100 similar reefs have been laid along the Spanish coasts, including around 25 of them in Andalucía.

This clearly indicates to any objective observer that HMGOG has had the political goodwill required to resolve all differences which have arisen with the fishermen.

As indicated previously by the Chief Minister, Fabian Picardo, and as stated by the Minister for the Environment, John Cortes, in Parliament last month, and in line with this policy, HMGOG is now finalising the necessary draft legislation to table in Parliament to make changes to the law to permit sustainable fishing in BGTW in a properly regulated and accountable manner that complies with the overriding principle of conservation of the marine environment and replenishment of fish stocks. This will also include new administrative provisions to ensure compliance with the new rules. HMGOG expects to finalise consultation with national stakeholders and shortly publish a Bill to this effect that the Parliament will be able to consider in October.

HMGOG is therefore confident that its Route Map to regulate sustainable fishing in BGTW will enjoy the support of environmental groups and indeed of all fishermen, of whatever nationality, interested in promoting sustainable fishing in the area for the benefit of all interested parties.

Separately, given the misunderstandings that have repeatedly arisen in the Spanish media over the question of dialogue, HMGOG reiterates its strong commitment, together with that already expressed by the British Government, to the Trilateral Forum for dialogue as well as to the potential parallel “ad hoc” dialogue which Mr Hague proposed last year and HMGOG has supported. There is no doubt that matters of interest to citizens on both sides of the frontier, whether related to fishing practices or otherwise, would best be resolved by direct dialogue to which Gibraltar has and remains open. HMGOG, therefore restates its express goodwill and disposition to enter “constructive and collaborative dialogue” with Spain in the immediate future on trilateral or “ad hoc” terms.

Chief Minister, Fabian Picardo said: “The Spanish Government’s politically motivated queues at the frontier, the threats made by Snr Margallo and the defamatory allegations repeatedly made about Gibraltar have not and will not succeed in changing the position of Her Majesty’s Government of Gibraltar. In the same way as such tactics will not serve to “soften” Gibraltar, neither will we allow them to harden our position. We will remain on the reasonable ground we have always been – ready to talk, confirming our action to implement sustainable fishing based on ‘active management’ measures and seeing through the route map we have long mapped out based on expert advice. We have developed this Route Map in consultation with the Gibraltar fishing fraternity, local conservation groups, the La Linea and Algeciras Cofradias and in keeping with Gemma Araujo’s reasonable and measured representation of the fishermen from her municipality.”

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