

December 3rd, 2024

Dear Commissioner Jorgensen,
Dear Commissioner Kadis,
Dear Commissioner Roswall,

Subject: Support for UK closure of industrial sandeel fishing in the North Sea

We were very concerned to learn that the Commission has decided to request an arbitration tribunal on the UK closure of industrial sandeel fishing, under the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA).

This undermines the UK and EU's ability to deliver large-scale ecosystem recovery in the North Sea and risks slowing down offshore renewables deployment.

Sandeels are an integral component of North Atlantic marine food webs and play a key role in ensuring an abundance of biodiversity in the marine environment. They are a vital food source to vulnerable seabirds, commercially important fish species such as cod, haddock, whiting and Atlantic salmon, and marine mammals including seals, porpoises, and whales. **The UK sandeel closure is scientifically recognised as a critical conservation effort and a vital step to strengthen the resilience of marine ecosystems.** It comes at a critical time, and it is underpinned by clear scientific evidence and overwhelming public support¹. The economic interests behind sandeel fishing are not comparable to the invaluable environmental benefits that the ban will bring to the region's ecology.

The sandeel closure carries significant implications for offshore energy too. It is key in providing the ecological resilience that would facilitate the large-scale development of renewables in the North Sea. It will mitigate potential negative impacts of offshore wind by building resilience in affected seabird and mammal populations. **This is a prime example of ecosystem-based management,** which necessitates immediate action on manageable pressures like sandeel fishing. If not addressed, this issue could put several offshore wind projects in the North Sea at risk and would thus undermine the UK and EU's climate strategies. While offshore wind infrastructure can have environmental impacts, wind developers are actively working to mitigate and minimise these effects. However, this is only possible when the marine ecosystem is resilient—a crucial factor for long-term sustainability.

We will continue to support the UK sandeel closure and urge you to reconsider the EU's position by withdrawing the request for an arbitration tribunal under the EU-UK TCA. The EU's current stance directly threatens the UK and EU's ability to achieve our environmental targets, which are binding commitments. It is already enough of a challenge that part of the current legislation makes it extremely difficult to establish fishery management measures. It now also jeopardise offshore wind targets that the EU and UK have adopted – to go from 35 GW installed capacity today to 150 GW by 2030.



Ariel Brunner
Regional Director at Birdlife Europe & Central Asia



Giles Dickson
CEO at WindEurope

¹ As shown by the results of both UK (DEFRA) and Scottish Government consultations (see results: [here](#) and [here](#))